

The background of the entire page is a composite image. On the right side, there is a close-up of a character's face, likely an android, with a glowing blue eye and a small blue ring-like light on the forehead. On the left side, there is a futuristic cityscape at night, with tall buildings and a prominent blue light source. The title text is overlaid on the cityscape part of the image.

# **ANDROIDS: HUMANS OR MACHINES?**

An analysis of the socio-cultural contexts of the videogame

**DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN**

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## Abstract

Androids have been a staple part of science fiction for many years, in which they are often used as a means of portraying certain societal issues in the real world of the audience. Given the rapidly growing technological advancements in the 21st century, the actual probability of the creation and mass production of human-like androids is becoming more and more real. Showing the implications of the creation of such machines is part of what the videogame *Detroit: Become Human* is all about, showing through the world and characters of the game the possibilities as well as the risks of such a technologically advanced future.

Through an in-depth analysis combining New Historicism with videogame theory, this thesis delves into the videogame *Detroit: Become Human*, created by David Cage and Quantic Dream in 2018, investigating the socio-cultural as well as the historical contexts that can be found between the secondary world (the world of the game), and the Primary World (the real world) of the player. Several historical events are investigated in the attempt to find correlations between the worldbuilding in the game and the history and culture of the Primary World, delving into the aspects of history, worldbuilding, Murray Smith's character engagement, and transhumanist theory, investigating topics such as Nazi-run concentration camps, social class, and racial segregation. The thesis likewise delves into the topics of transhumanism due to the exponential technological growth in regards to robots and artificial intelligence which is undoubtedly happening at a much more rapid pace than that of human growth. With this rapid growth of technology, the topic of androids and other robotic creations has been a big topic of discussion in anything from fictional works to scholarly writings and political ideologies, likewise seeming to be a great point of focus for Cage and Quantic Dream.

Ultimately, it is argued that the androids of *Detroit: Become Human* are portrayed as being closely linked with the people of color in the Primary World, clearly referencing the enslavement of the "other" through history as well as the treatment of those that do not fit into the category of being white in the Primary World of the 21st century. It is likewise concluded that the androids are a clear example of the differences in social classes, portraying the androids as belonging to the lower end of the class spectrum, while the humans all belong to the upper class, proving the argument that the androids have taken over the role of the Primary World's "other" in the secondary world of the game.

## Introduction

It is undebatable that the exponential growth of technology and artificial entities is happening at a much more rapid pace than that of human development, and with this rapid growth of technology, the topic of androids and other robotic creations has been a big topic of discussion in anything from fictional works to scholarly writings and even political ideologies. In science fiction, robots and androids have been prevalent for many years, where they have commonly been used as a means to bring to light the injustices of the real world through their portrayal in worlds of fiction. Likewise, the discussion of whether videogames might be used as a means of commenting on socio-cultural issues has become more and more popular in recent years in scholarly works from people such as Clara Fernández-Vara, Espen Aarseth, and Mark Wolf. These scholars argue that videogames have begun resembling films in their way of treating such topics, as more and more videogames with deeper contextual meanings are produced through time, enlightening their players through game design, storytelling, and worldbuilding, commenting on the state of both the contemporary world today yet also the history of it. The aspect of worldbuilding itself is also laced with the need for parallels between the real world of the author and the fictional world of her or his work, drawing on cultural and historical contexts that the audience might know, which then in turn helps further their understanding of the work.

In 2018, the long-in-the-making videogame *Detroit: Become Human*, developed by the French videogame company Quantic Dreams, was released. The game was inspired by their previously created short film, *KARA*, and had been many years underway due to the vast amount of research needed before the production could even start, followed by an immense worldbuilding of the game's world, including an extensive number of storylines, characters, and graphics needing to be developed before the release. This game, while of course having been created as a means for entertainment, is a clear example of a science fiction work using androids as a means of portraying both current as well as historical injustices of the real world. By following several characters through rather extensive and expansive storylines with multiple outcomes in every sequence, the videogame touches upon topics such as social class, slavery, and transhumanism, as the story of the game and its characters unfolds, though just how this context can be seen remains to be investigated through this thesis. Through character interactions as well as the expansive worldbuilding showing the harsh reality behind different social class layers and racial inequality, it might be possible to draw parallels between the real world of the player and the fictional world of the game. The goal of this thesis is

therefore, by investigating the creator's inspirations from historical and cultural events as well as philosophies such as transhumanism and android theory, to attempt to reach an understanding of the historical and cultural backgrounds which may have served as context for the creation of the video game *Detroit: Become Human*, and thereby explore the history and culture of the world of the player in relation to the fictional world of the game. The goal is to understand why the player comes across certain aspects of the worldbuilding, how these aspects can relate to societal issues in the real world, as well as how this worldbuilding as well as the character development might affect the character engagement that the player inevitably experiences through the approximately 10-hour long gameplay (Guide: *Detroit: Become Human*).

## ○ Field of study

The field of study for this project is the historical and cultural contexts that played part in the creation of the game, *Detroit: Become Human*. The aim of this project is, through an analysis of the game, its worldbuilding, and its contemporary history, as well as historical aspects of the past, to reach an understanding of how the world, the storyline, and the characters have been shaped both by the writer, David Cage, and the historical and cultural contexts of the game. Along with this, the project will also touch upon how the gameplay immerses the players and portrays the cultural and historical contexts to them.

## ○ Research question

How does the *Detroit: Become Human* universe reflect on the cultural and historical context of the game, and how can gameplay analysis methodologically be merged with a cultural analysis?

## *Detroit: Become Human*

The events of David Cage's videogame *Detroit: Become Human* are mostly set in the city of Detroit, Michigan in the year 2038. The Detroit-based company CyberLife manufactures and sells very lifelike androids, naming Detroit "the android city". These androids are being produced for work purposes, working for the normal American citizen as e.g. housekeepers or caretakers of the sick and elderly as well as working in industrial jobs, working as shopkeepers, as garbage collectors, as soldiers, and in many other positions. The increasing number of androids being produced for these types of work is seen in the game to have resulted in an increasing number of human workers being laid off, which leaves many citizens angry at the androids for robbing them of their jobs. The public's general opinion of the androids is therefore not exactly positive at the beginning of the game.

Throughout the game, the player controls three main characters, Connor, Kara, and Markus, all of which are androids. The player follows their stories as they each go through their own separate struggles of identity and social injustice, as their storylines intertwine, and as the player is put in moral dilemmas when facing multiple choices in regards to what the actions of the androids should be. The three characters that the player follows are quite different both in regards to their job positions, their physical features, and the way they are treated by their employers. Connor is an android detective, who is assigned to Lieutenant Hank Anderson in order to aid him in solving crimes. Kara works as a maid and nanny to a single, abusive father and his daughter. Markus, is a caretaker for an old, kind-hearted artist. All three characters are introduced in their regular environments, though the tension between humans and androids soon starts escalating, causing the player to have to choose what stance the androids will take in regards to the situation, whether Markus should be peaceful or forceful in his protests against the treatment of androids, how Kara should make her way to the free land of Canada, and whether Connor should fight with or against the androids wanting to achieve their freedom. Along this way, the player has many choices to make, many which can result in an unwanted turn of events or the death of a character, although the construction of the game allows the player to go back and replay each sequence, if they are unhappy with how the events have turned out.

*Detroit: Become Human* is a narrative-heavy videogame that “explores several real-life issues, and ultimately offers an interpretation of what it means to be human.” (Pettersen 13). The game allows for much freedom of choice for the player, giving them a great deal of control of what the playable characters should say or do in certain situations. The game consists of chapters in which the storylines of the playable protagonists unfold. When each chapter ends, the player can view the branching narrative in full in the flowchart which “shows the player’s choices, but also the other available alternatives the player could have taken instead. One decision might lead to a whole different section of narrative choices, and the outcome of the storyline varies enormously” (Pettersen 14).

## Theory

In order to be able to thoroughly analyze and understand the historical and cultural context that may have influenced *Detroit: Become Human*, as well as how this context shines through, there are a few different theories that could prove to be valuable options for such an analysis. In this contextual analysis, the two main theories that will be utilized are the New Historicist theory as well as game analysis, also referred to as videogame theory, as these two theories should be able to provide

a thorough insight into both the historical and cultural context as well as how this is portrayed in the game.

## ○ New Historicism

New Historicism is a literary theory originally used in Renaissance studies (Brannigan 1) to analyze works from the Renaissance period. The term was originally coined by Stephen Greenblatt, the leading figure in the field (Robson 1), and was coined by him in the beginning of the 1980's (Parvini 81). New Historicism is also often referred to as "cultural poetics" (Thomas 3), which is especially preferred by Greenblatt himself, though it has not seemed to stick as well as New Historicism did. According to Suzanne Gearhart, it is not easy to provide a simple, short summary of the meaning to the term New Historicism, as the many-sided nature of the project as well as the work that is produced by the New Historicists varies greatly (Gearhart 457). New historicism has been influenced by many different theorists (Parini 455), yet as one of the main inspirations for New Historicism was psychoanalytic theory (Gearhart 458), it is clear that Foucault was one of the main influences for the creation of New Historicism (Parvini 76), as the focus of New Historicism lies on the connection between power and knowledge as well as its attention to institutional structures, which were things that Foucault focused a lot on (Parini 455).

New Historicism has derived somewhat from the older theory of historicism, arguably still sharing rather strong ties with the older, more traditional theory (Morris 8). Brook Thomas mentions that there was a lack of a proper outline in the beginning of how the theory was to be used, which was unlike the "old" historicism, which had been clearly outlined (Thomas 3), as some believe the point to this theory to be to establish that there is just one fixed, universal point of view on history, arguing that the meaning behind and value of any event in history is set in stone (Morris 5). Gearhart refers to New Historicism as an "influential form of literary criticism", arguing that the reconstruction of the "old" historicism was made due to frustrations with how limited the possibility was of describing the relation between cultural artifacts, visual, literary, theatrical, etc., as well as the historical forces and subjects which many historians previously believed merely reflected (Gearhart 457). Despite what appears to be a slight lacking in Greenblatt's own outlining of what exactly New Historicism is and how it is to be used, several scholars have been able to make sense of it.

Harold Aram Veesser argues that the creation of New Historicism provided scholars with the opportunity to cross the boundaries that usually separate history, art, literature, politics, anthropology, and economics, as well as providing humanists with the opportunity of questioning politics and power

(Veese ix), making it possible to understand a work based on more than just single aspects, and therefore being able to provide a more in-depth analysis of a work. Mark Robson argues that one of the things that New Historicism is capable of providing is the possibility to take imagined things seriously (Robson 106), meaning that although a piece of work may be a completely imaginary work of art, it is still possible to look at this work as if it were a real-life text such as a political speech or statement, as a fictional work holds just as much importance when analyzing the historical, social and cultural influences on it as a non-fictional work would.

The new historicist must argue that the individual work stands free of its historical context while it simultaneously draws its audience toward that context. (Morris 13)

In comparison to most other historical theories, New Historicism focuses a great deal on the historical context that surrounds a piece of work (Robson 22), no matter if this piece of work is an imaginary work of art or a political speech. Veese argues that through New Historicism, theorists have established new ways to study history through a new awareness of exactly how history is defined by culture, and the other way around (Veese xii). In relation to the quote above, Wesley Morris argues that the somewhat paradoxical approach to separate the work from its context while at the same time drawing the audience towards it might mean that it is not possible to reach a completely satisfactory analysis, though he argues that “the effort seems to be justified by the rewards” (12-13). Therefore, despite not reaching a complete analysis in the end, the discussion of the context of the work itself tends to be enough.

To further back this argument of New Historicists having found a new way of studying history, Thomas mentions that New Historicism has a saying, which is that “The text is historical; and history is textual” (Thomas 7). Therefore, New Historicism would appear to argue that it is impossible to separate history from its social and cultural influences, stating that history and text are always intertwined. New Historicism would also argue that the past is not set in stone, as the view on any text, event or any piece of history will undoubtedly be colored by one’s own influences based on one’s own place in history and society (Robson 7). Therefore, New Historicists believe that history is left up to interpretation, and that no two people will necessarily be able to interpret a work or a historical event in the exact same way.

According to Veese, New Historicists take inspiration from Clifford Geertz’ “thick description” in their way of analyzing texts. Geertz explains that “thick description” is a more thorough analysis that goes beyond what is apparent at first, providing an idea of all the different

possibilities that might lay behind a certain text or event, whereas “thin description” is simply a rather superficial explanation of what happens in the text or during the event (Geertz 5-6). With the aid of thick description, New Historicists can provide a contextual analysis of the tiny particulars of an event or a text in such a way that they can reveal motive forces, logics, and behavioral codes that control an entire society, ultimately making it possible to unveil exactly how society and culture might affect each other. New Historicism likewise tries to encourage the reader to try to understand the intricacy and unavoidability of the exchanges that happen between power and culture (Veesser xi). Gearhart argues that “the question of the relation between cultural analysis and psychoanalysis arises naturally in connection with their vision of how power “subjects,” that is to say, how power imposes itself on, or even better, forms or creates individual subjects” (Gearhart 458). While it can be said that people shape history, Robson quotes Marx’s saying that “Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted” (Robson 27), which is a saying that Greenblatt himself would seem to agree with, as New Historicism would seem to argue that certain circumstances such as society and culture might affect how history is formed as well as how it is understood, depending on the eyes looking at the historical event in question.

New Historicism can therefore be said to have been formed by many different methods of approaching an analysis, all hand-picked by Stephen Greenblatt. The theory is, most importantly for this project, a mix of Foucault’s views on power, his belief that it is everywhere, affecting everything (Robson 20), the idea that the outcome of an analysis will inevitably differ depending on the eyes looking at a text, and thick description, which allows for a very thorough analysis of a text or an event. In the case of *Detroit: Become Human*, New Historicism will therefore be able to provide the ability to look at the contexts that can be found between the videogame and the history and cultures that have inspired its making, therefore proving it to be a good theory to make use of alongside game analysis.

## Game analysis

The irreducibility of the video game is precisely why it has been hard to define formally and why there is heated discussion not only around what it *should* be, but also around what exactly it *is*. (Wolf, Perron)

As more and more videogames began being produced in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, it became apparent that there were no theories of analysis that could be utilized to thoroughly analyze

these games (Aarseth 1). Still in the late 2010's, there were limited amounts of exploration into the field of game analysis theories, as most of the knowledge of games to this day has been produced from the marketing of games, journalistic articles and blog posts (Fernández-Vara 11). Therefore, videogame theory is very much a convergence of several different kinds of approaches such as film and television theory, literary theory, performance theory, ludology, narratology, semiotics, and many others (Wolf). Tanya Pettersen argues that current videogame research mainly focuses on the design aspect of videogames, whereas in recent years, videogames have begun carefully weighing the content of their games, focusing more and more on conveying more heartfelt messages through storytelling, which has not yet thoroughly made its way into the works of many researchers (12), arguably creating a good opportunity for theorists to look at videogames based on their narratives.

Espen Aarseth is one of the theorists whose main focus within the analysis of videogames lies on narrative theory, arguing whether or not computer games are a form of stories or not, which has been a big question from theorists since the beginning of the 2000's (Aarseth 1). Many different opinions have been voiced in regards to theories relating to games, some arguing that games are always stories, whereas others argue that the videogame is not a narrative medium at all. Espen Aarseth argues that both sides hold some truth, as some games are narrative whereas others are not, though that arguments made on both sides are not nearly nuanced enough (Aarseth 1). Pettersen likewise argues that not all games have a narrative focus, though videogames have begun to become more focused on storytelling in recent years, providing games that are heavier in regards to narratives as well as being far more socio-critical, touching upon anything from sexual identity to mental health or even to war and slavery (13).

In her book, *Introduction to Game Analysis*, Clara Fernández-Vara goes much further into depth with game analysis as a whole from start to finish. She writes that games hold a certain cultural significance, which we can derive from the context of play, including who plays the game, why and how they play it, and how the practice of playing the game can relate to other socio-cultural practices. Therefore, when analyzing a game, we study the meaning within the game as well as around it (Fernández-Vara 6).

When analyzing a game, it is near impossible to overlook the player completely, as the player, according to Fernández-Vara is a necessary part of the text. When studying games, investigating how players engage with the game is often important, e.g. by investigating how they understand and interact with the rules, how they create goals for themselves, and how they communicate with other

players (Fernández-Vara 7). Due to the amount of interaction between the players and the game, games constantly encode certain ideas and values, which the players constantly decode and interact with when playing (Fernández-Vara 9).

Fernández-Vara believes that taking a textual analyst standpoint in relation to game analysis is the way to go, believing that “the aim of textual analysis in general, and this approach to game analysis in particular, focuses less on making value judgments on the game and more on appreciating how we make sense of them.” (Fernández-Vara 11), therefore focusing mostly on what the player gathers from the experience while playing the game.

There are many different aspects to a game that one can analyze (Fernández-Vara 14), which is why it is important to try to narrow down one’s area of interest. Different theorists split video game analysis up into different areas of focus (Wolf, Perron), though there are, however, three main, interrelated areas according to Fernández-Vara that one can pick and choose between, which are the context, the game overview, and the formal aspects of the game, and each of these areas consist of several ‘building blocks’, as she calls it. One can then choose which of these building blocks will be able to provide aid in the intended analysis (Fernández-Vara 14).

In short, the context of the game helps us understand the text by informing us of the circumstances in which the game is both produced and played, as well as informing us of other texts or communities that might relate to it (Fernández-Vara 15). The game overview focuses on the content of the game, the basic features that set the game apart from others, as well as how it has been read, appropriated, and changed by different audiences. It can provide us with an idea of what the game is all about as well as who plays it (Fernández-Vara 16). The formal aspects help us study how the game is constructed, allowing us to look into “the system of the game and its components (the rules, the control schemes), as well as how the system is presented to the player (interface design, visual style).” (Fernández-Vara 17).

When researching the context of a game, it is normal to make use of both academic and journalistic writings about it (Fernández-Vara 36), as both can help provide a more thorough understanding of how the game is constructed, what the meaning behind the game is, and how the player might understand and interact with it. Therefore, the use of game analysis makes it possible to combine scholarly works with e.g. creator interviews in order to reach as thorough an understanding of the worldbuilding as well as the cultural and historical contexts of the game.

As mentioned, there are many different ways of analyzing a game. Though, when keeping in mind the goal of this thesis, which is to analyze the historical and socio-cultural context of the videogame *Detroit: Become Human*, there are some areas of analysis that will be of more use than others. Aside from analyzing the general narrative, world, and characters of the game, one very important part of this analysis will, of course, be to analyze the context of the game. As videogames are products of their time, the context of the game can help situate these games both historically, culturally, socially, and also economically. Therefore, it is important to understand the socio-cultural environment in which a game is produced, as this context can provide information about the reason for the production of the game, as well as explain why the content of the game has been produced in the manner that it has (Fernández-Vara 61-62). Fernández-Vara likewise explains that it is also very important to understand the socio-cultural context of the game, especially if the game that is being analyzed has been produced in a different culture than the one in which the analysis is written (Fernández-Vara 63).

## Methodology

By analyzing the videogame *Detroit: Become Human*, with the main focus being on the historical and cultural contexts that surround the game, this project intends to find out whether these come to show through the game or not, as well as to explore the topic of humans versus androids and the social status of androids in fiction through time.

There were quite a few theories up for consideration during the research stage of this project before the decision was made to focus on New Historicism and game analysis, as New Historicism combined with game analysis would be able to provide the possibility of investigating the historical and cultural contexts of the game while delving into both the history of the real world as well as the specifics of the worldbuilding and the character creation in the game itself. Many of the otherwise considered theories, such as e.g. realism, did not appear to be able to thoroughly aid in analyzing the aspect of *Detroit: Become Human* in relation to its historical and cultural context in the preferred way. Realism, however, was originally the main contender aside from New Historicism, given that it is a theory that focuses greatly on the aspect of whether the contents of a work are realistic or not, arguing that all fiction stems from some form of reality (Langkjær 61-62). Making use of the theory of realism would have therefore made it possible to ask the question of whether the world of *Detroit: Become Human* was realistic or not, delving into what the work may have borrowed from the real world as well as what it might say about the world that is to be, at least in the eyes of the creators of

the game. While this would arguably be a very intriguing method of analyzing the game, possibly providing some very interesting discoveries and arguments, ultimately, New Historicism won out due to its ability to move beyond that which is realistic, being able to focus on historical and cultural contexts in any type of realistic or unrealistic work and linking these to several different aspects of the real world culture, history, and politics. The topic of whether or not all aspects of the game would be viewed as realistic was not at the forefront of this thesis rather than the focus simply being on the historical, social, political, and cultural background of the game, as well as what the game seemed to say about the real world as it is now, has been in the past, and should be in the future.

### ○ Can New Historicism analyze a futuristic work?

Given that New Historicism is a theory used to analyze the socio-historical context of a given work, relating the work to the historical and social aspects of the work's contemporary time which may have affected its production, the game *Detroit: Become Human* can be said to fall slightly outside this category of work. The game takes place in a futuristic Detroit twenty years from its year of creation, which poses the question: can New Historicism analyze a futuristic work?

Despite the fact that it is a futuristic work, it has been created in the year 2018, which makes it possible to analyze it based on the historical, cultural and social aspects of this time, which may have affected the creation of the work. Likewise, the work may have been inspired by historical events that might have occurred several years prior to the creation of the game. Either, the work is influenced by the culture and society which the creator of the work is part of, or it is influenced by a past historical context which may not be contemporary to the work. Therefore, it can be argued that simply because the game itself is set in the future, it is not impossible to analyze it from a New Historicist perspective. Especially when combined with game analysis, which also allows for an in-depth look into the socio-historical context of a game, there should be no issues in regards to making use of New Historicism to analyze a recently created, futuristic videogame.

Robson, as previously mentioned, argues that New Historicism generally makes it possible to look at and analyze a fictional work of art just as one would a non-fictional work, also arguing that it is impossible to separate history from its social and cultural influences, as history and text is intertwined, art affecting history, and history likewise affecting art. Due to these arguments, as well as the general point made by New Historicists that the author's own influences from their own place in society, culture and history can influence a work just as the audiences' can, New Historicism should arguably be able to provide a thorough outlook on a piece of work no matter the time period in which

it was created. A piece of work will continue to be relevant no matter its age, as it may hold references to previous historical, cultural and societal contexts, constantly being open to interpretation by whatever audience might look at it, allowing them to form their own views on the work based on their own time and place in history, culture and society. So, whereas a work such as *Detroit: Become Human* might hold a great deal of references to other periods of history, the extent and meaning of these are up for interpretation depending on the author's life or the audiences' lives.

## Analysis

### ○ The history of science fiction and androids

*Detroit: Become Human*, while being a videogame, shares many similarities with the science fiction genre in regards to both the content as well as the overall look of the game. This part of the analysis will investigate the origins of the science fiction genre as well as the origins of robots and androids in fiction, while also delving into the differences between the two types of machines. The analysis will also look into what makes a piece of work a part of the science fiction genre as well as how science fiction might comment on socio-cultural aspects of the real world through the fictional universe of the work, as well as explain the aspects of the science fiction genre that can be found in the game.

### ○ Defining science fiction

Science fiction was rather small-scale up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it became part of pop-culture (Roberts 3), and the genre is said to have quickly become increasingly popular after the bombing of Hiroshima as well as during the period of the Cold War (Hockley 62). Most authors would argue that the science fiction genre as a self-conscious publishing category can be considered to have had its beginning in Hugo Gernsback's first issue of *Amazing Stories*, the first ever magazine devoted specifically to science fiction, in the year 1926 (Booker, Thomas 7), though many authors would argue that the genre has been around for much longer, though there are many different opinions in regards to exactly when the genre properly emerged. Where science fiction begins exactly has been a source of many arguments between critics over the years, as some believe that science fiction cannot have existed before science, as it is understood today, emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Booker, Thomas 5), whereas others believe that science fiction works were created long before then (Roberts 3). Mark Bould and Sherryll Vint believe that despite the fact that the term 'science fiction' did not appear until around the 1930's, it can be argued that what would now be considered science fiction elements did

appear in texts long before this time (Bould, Vint 1). However, Jan Johnson-Smith mentions that Damien Broderick would disagree with Bould and Vint, arguing instead that it is a more modern genre due to the fact that the technologies generally used in sci-fi works are relatively new. Lester del Rey, however, believes that there is a direct lineage that can be seen all the way back from Mesopotamian texts (Johnson-Smith 16).

It is not only the time of origin of the genre which is difficult to pinpoint, however. According to Booker and Thomas in *The Science Fiction Handbook*, it is rather complicated to define science fiction as a genre as well as how it differs from other genres such as fantasy and horror (Booker, Thomas 3), as many critics have offered different definitions of the genre over the years (Roberts 1). According to Johnson-Smith, this is due to the fact that the contents of different science fiction works are not always similar geographically, temporally or ideologically, as all works within most other genres usually are (Johnson-Smith 16). One of the main reasons why it can be difficult to define the genre of science fiction is that the iconography is not as obvious for the genre as it might be for genres such as the western or the gangster genre. The iconography of a genre is by some said to be the “continuity over several decades of patterns of visual imagery, of recurrent objects and figures in dynamic relationship” (Sobchack 4). Johnson-Smith argues that works from a genre such as the western will, although they might not all include Native Americans, trains, gunfighters, saloons, and pioneers, generally share enough geographical, ideological, and temporal elements to have the audience be able to quickly identify them as belonging to the same genre. However, Sobchack argues that while the iconography of some genres can be quite obvious, the same cannot be said for the science fiction genre, as there are so many elements that can be present in science fiction, which are not actually essential to the genre (Sobchack 4), making it harder to pinpoint exactly what it is that evokes the genre. According to Johnson-Smith, science fiction works do not need to include aliens or spaceships or necessarily be set in the future, yet they will generally have enough similarities in regards to geography, time, and ideology that they will be recognizable as science fiction works (Johnson-Smith 16). A work such as *Detroit: Become Human* is set in the future, 20 years from the year of its release, and its world contains a vast amount of technology which is much more developed than the technology that could be found around the world in 2018. The player is constantly faced with much more automation in general, such as automated taxis and high-tech surveillance drones, and, of course, not to mention the existence of the very human-looking androids that have been built to mimic humans to near-perfection, aside from a slight issue in regards to emotional capacity within their programming as well as a growing tendency towards deviancy.

Science fiction can be set in the past, present and future. It can involve futuristic gadgets, weaponry, clothing, housing and transportation, including silver suits, intergalactic space crafts, flying cars and light sabres. But science fiction can also involve the mere ‘copying’ of existing social and cultural relations so that what the audience sees and hears in part resembles closely the world as it is experienced on a daily basis. (Redmond 2)

What Sean Redmond argues in the above quote is that while there is a certain iconography which the audience will usually link to science fiction, a work will not necessarily include them all, as some works of the genre might portray a reality which looks a lot more similar to that of the audience’s own reality. Hockley argues that science fiction television and cinema tend to reflect on contemporary political and social problems (Hockley 62). In regards to the science fiction-genre as seen in television series, Luke Hockley argues that sci-fi tv-series often differ from sci-fi movies in the cinema in how they do not tend to focus only on entertaining the audience, but also on teaching the audience, as he says that “Underneath its unusual and often slightly flashy *mise en scène*, science-fiction television has a track record of addressing moral, ethical, political and philosophical themes – what Sobchack refers to as the ‘intellectual development of an abstract premise’” (Hockley 62). Science fiction stories generally tend to highlight differences at multiple levels from what Johnson-Smith calls ‘mundane’ fiction, as this is necessary for the science fiction works to do in order to convince them of the existence of the world. There are usually “several key underlying conventions of realism” in science fiction works according to Johnson-Smith, which is to further this sense of reality (Johnson-Smith 20).

Tanya Pettersen argues that a narrative-heavy game such as *Detroit: Become Human* bears heavy resemblance to the science fiction film genre, as the game treats many of the same issues that science fiction does (Pettersen 7), arguing that the game “draws on several ethical debates in the twenty-first century industrialized cultures, making interesting predictions, such as what the world will look like in terms of technological development and environmental issues.” (Pettersen 10), therefore bringing in a certain sense of realism into the game through the way it portrays certain aspects of the world, its history, its culture, and its characters.

## Defining androids

Just like how spaceships and aliens make regular appearances in science fiction works, something which is seen more and more in both fiction and non-fiction works along with technological development, is the android. One of the first terms for what we today would call the

robot, or the android, is ‘automaton’, which derives from the Greek word for ‘self-acting’. The term ‘robot’, derived from the words ‘robotnik’ and ‘robota’, meaning ‘workman’ and ‘compulsory labor’, and was first used in Karel Capek’s Czech play, *R.U.R.*, in 1921, in which the robots look absolutely indistinguishable from humans (Ash 172). The term ‘android’ also comes from the Greek, from the word for ‘man-like’ (Ash 172). The term “androides” seems to have first been seen used in English in 1727 in what Brian Stableford calls alchemical literature, referencing to rumors of attempts by believed practitioners Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus to create “homunculi”, miniature humans, though it did not become commonplace until many years later (22).

When investigating the topic of androids, it might be helpful to first understand what an android is, how it differs from a robot or a machine in general, and what the hierarchy is between them. According to Andrew White at Techgearoid, “All robots are, in essence, machines however not all machines are robots”, arguing that unlike regular machines, robots are able to work autonomously by relying on their programming, which is the series of instructions necessary for them to be given in order for them to perform the task in question (White). While the terms ‘robot’ and ‘android’ have at times been used as if meaning the same thing (White), the difference between the robot and the android is in their appearance, as robots’ bodies are visibly mechanical whereas the mechanics of the androids’ bodies are concealed, making them able to blend in with humans (Piper 97). The physical appearance is not always enough for an android to separate itself from a robot, however, as “A robot can, but does not necessarily have to be in the form of a human, but an android is always in the form of a human.” (Woychowsky). Complex androids will therefore stand out from robots through their ability to show facial expressions as well as mimic complex human behavior (White). There is, of course, also the matter of the cyborg, though this creation is what would be considered as being “a ‘cybernetic organism’ that enhances human capabilities”, meaning technological advancements made on the human body, such as robotic limbs or technological enhancements to sight, breathing, or other internal bodily functions (Law, Moser 3202). It can be argued that there is a clear hierarchy from the machine to the human, if we consider the human to be the top of the chain: machine -> robot -> android -> cyborg -> human. However, this hierarchy is of course interchangeable depending on the eyes looking upon it, as some theorists might regard the technologically advanced androids to be above humans.

The specific role of the android can be said to differ greatly between the different works, as most objects generally hold certain meanings in certain genres. Given that the genre of science fiction, as previously established, is so hard to pinpoint, the meaning behind most objects in the genre might

not be as simple to define. Spaceships, for example, do not have just one consistent meaning according to Sobchack. In some cases, they can be seen and used completely neutrally, simply as a means of transport, or a place for characters to reside in. In other cases, they can be viewed as something positive, a magnificent result of the wonders of technology, a promise of great adventures and endless possibilities. However, they can also be viewed as something negative, a cold and hostile trap, the home of malicious aliens that wish harm upon human kind (Sobchack 5-6). In line with the spaceship, the androids seen in science fiction also seem to hold very different meanings and roles. While there have been created works of fiction portraying robots and androids as beings capable of mass destruction, waging war on and killing their creators, they have also often been portrayed as kind beings capable of feeling compassion towards- and love for their creators (Ash 177-180). This theory of Sobchack's can very well be applied to *Detroit: Become Human* in the sense that androids also do not have just one consistent meaning, which the game itself even addresses through interactions between the androids and the humans. Some humans clearly believe the androids to be tin cans, robots without emotions, created in order to be used as free labor. Others, such as Rose Chapman, the kindhearted, black woman who helps androids escape across the border to Canada, wishes to help the androids, believing them just as capable of thought and emotion as humans, believing that they deserve a chance at living a normal life free from slavery. The player likewise has several different options in regards to how they wish for the three playable androids to behave, whether they want them to peacefully ask for freedom or wage war on the humans in an attempt to threaten and fight their way to being free.

While Stableford argues that the term of android is usually used to differentiate from the term of robot, "reserving it for artificial humanoids made from synthetic flesh rather than inorganic components" (Stableford 22), the androids of *Detroit: Become Human* do appear to be made up of a robotic exterior. However, they do have what appears to be a fake, human-like skin which can be turned on and off, showing a grayish white metal underneath. The androids also have Thirium, also called "blue blood" pumping through veins as well as other biocomponents that function very much like human organs, such as a component to pump the blue blood around the android's body, much like the human heart does in the human body. The androids in the game do therefore deviate slightly from what Stableford would call the stereotypical android, but while their exterior might be metal that is merely covered by an illusion of skin, their insides are much more resembling of human organs.

## ○ Worldbuilding: Detroit vs Canada

When creating a work of fiction, the author also has to create a world to go along with the story and the characters. This part of the analysis will focus on the creation of fictional worlds and whether or not they are useful in commenting on certain historical, societal, and cultural aspects of the real world. In relation to this, an in-depth look of the world of *Detroit: Become Human*, which is mainly the city of Detroit, will follow, in an attempt to understand why Detroit might have been chosen as the main setting for the game, as well as what social commentary might be found in its worldbuilding. Likewise, the analysis will also touch lightly upon the portrayal of Canada in relation to the U.S., investigating the differences in how the two countries are portrayed in e.g. magazine texts or through conversations between androids, ultimately delving into the socio-cultural as well as the historical context of both Detroit as well as Canada.

In *Detroit: Become Human*, Detroit, Michigan, is a technologically booming city teeming with life, at least in the downtown area, though the outskirts of town seem to be in a much greater state of disrepair. While Detroit is set as the main stage for the unfolding of the events of the game, Canada is often mentioned as what seems to be a “safe haven” for androids, though it is made clear that they do not legally allow them to enter the country. To fully understand the reasoning behind picking this city in the “Rust Belt” of America as the setting for the game and Canada as the “land of the free”, as well as understand why the city of Detroit has been portrayed in the way that it has, there are many different aspects to the world of the videogame to further explore. It is therefore important to understand the aspect of the worldbuilding of the game as well as the history of both Detroit and Canada, as to provide some historical and cultural context to the game.

## ○ Worldbuilding

Whether through verbal description, visual design, sound design, or virtual spaces revealed through interaction, it is the world (sometimes referred to as the storyworld or diegetic world) that supports all the narratives set in it and that is constantly present during the audience’s experience. (Wolf 16-17)

Fernández-Vara explains that by investigating the fictional world, it is possible to identify a game’s theme, what happens in the game’s world, and also which conventions or stories that the world might induce in the player of the game (Fernández-Vara 116). The creation of this fictional world of videogames, as well as other works of fiction, is what is referred to as ‘worldbuilding’.

Within the topic of worldbuilding, Mark Wolf is one of the main contributors, having written several works on the topic of imaginary worlds. In his book *Building Imaginary Worlds*, he describes the many different aspects that might be seen when one is looking at the imaginary world of a fictive work. Before delving further into what makes a world, there are some different terms that can be used when discussing the topics of worldbuilding and worlds in fiction, which should be mentioned first of all. The broadest, least technical term when discussing worlds is “imaginary world”, more specific ones being “secondary world”, “diegetic world”, “subcreated world”, etc. (Wolf 14). This project will focus primarily on the term “secondary world”, which refers to the world of the work, as well as that of “Primary World”, which refers to the real world that the audience and the author live in (Wolf 14).

Worldbuilding is, according to independent scholar Leah Zaidi, “the process of constructing a complete and plausible imaginary world that serves as a context for a story” (Zaidi 17), meaning a world which is entirely believable to the audience. The creation of a sustainable, believable imaginary world is one of the most fundamental things that a work needs to establish as quickly and efficiently as possible, regardless of the medium (Johnson-Smith 19). This creation of reality in works of fiction is very important to worldbuilding, and needs to entail the creation of many different features such as geographical, cultural, and social features (Zaidi 17), in order to fully establish a believable reality within the fictional world. The process of worldbuilding is very important to fictional works, as, according to Wolf, “worlds often exist to support the stories set in them” (Wolf 29), meaning that the story is often created first, then followed by the creation of a world which can provide further history and context to the story, providing more depth to the story and encouraging the reader to become more invested in it. A world does not necessarily require a story in order to exist, however, although any existing story implies that there is a world of some sort in which it takes place (Wolf 29). Zaidi backs this argument, mentioning in her article *Worldbuilding in science fiction, foresight and design* that “All stories require some worldbuilding, whether the story takes place in Rome in 500 B.C., or modern-day Tokyo, or in a galaxy far, far away.” (Zaidi 18).

When we engage a fictional world—whether the fantastic universe of the Star Wars franchise or the relatively close-to-life rendition of James Joyce’s Dublin—we step outside our own reality, suspend our disbelief, and temporarily commit to the internal reality of that world. When we engage a time-past in the works of Shakespeare or a time-yet-to-come in the works of Philip K. Dick, we leave the present day and visit an era that is clearly separate from our own. And when we enjoy J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter universe or J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle

Earth, we accept a world that allows for mysticism, magic, and monsters, regardless of whether we'd accept the logic of those possibilities in our own world. (Buerkle 159-160)

According to the quote from Buerkle above, it can be argued that when stepping into a fictional world, the audience will naturally step out of their own reality, thereby forgetting what they know can and cannot be real in the audience's own world. Instead they will believe and accept whatever facts they meet in the world of the fictional work which they are engaging in. Thereby it should arguably be rather easy to convince the audience of anything from the existence of magic to histories, cultures or languages vastly different from those familiar to them from the Primary World. During the world-building process, given that secondary worlds can be created to be very different from the Primary World, Wolf mentions that it is easy to shape everything from history and culture to geography or language in order for the author to tell exactly the story and share exactly the philosophy that she or he wants to share in order to make a point (Wolf 192-193). The creator, David Cage, does put a lot of focus on cultural as well as historical issues in the game, taking both geography and language in account when highlighting these problems. As the game is set in a future Detroit, it is important to look at the historical ties between the Detroit of the secondary world in *Detroit: Become Human* and the Detroit of the Primary World in order to fully understand the influences that the culture and history of the Primary World has had on the author's philosophy, and through that the secondary world in the game. Therefore, before delving further into the theory of worldbuilding, a good question to ask is what the history of Detroit is, and why the author specifically chose Detroit as the main location for the game's events to unfold at.

## Why Detroit?

Worldbuilding and storytelling might provide a possibility for creators to challenge societal values of their own time without necessarily offending otherwise protected values of society (Zaidi 18), which can be quite impactful on the audience given that they are so likely to enter fully into the world of a given story, allowing for the events of this world to affect them despite the awareness of the fact that they have never actually occurred (Buerkle 156). And given that the audience so readily allows themselves to be affected by occurrences experienced within a work such as a videogame, everything from the story to the characters and also to the setting of the work itself is incredibly important in order for the creator to be able to portray to their audience exactly what she or he wishes to portray.

Some of the main questions that Fernández-Vara poses when one is looking to identify the fictional world of a game is where the game takes place, if the fictional world can be associated with a certain genre, if the fictional world is based on actual historical settings, and what the role of the player is in the fictional world (Fernández-Vara 117). As mentioned already, the science fictionesque story of the game mainly takes place in the city of Detroit, Michigan, which is located in the Rustbelt of America. Fernández-Vara's question of whether there are any actual historical settings that the fictional world of the game might be based off of is very valid in the case of *Detroit: Become Human*, as it might help provide a thorough insight into why Detroit was decided to be the main setting of the game.

Although the company that produced the game is French, Cage chose Detroit as the city where most of the game unfolds for very specific reasons. In an interview with Gamespot, he explained that he chose to have the game set in Detroit due to its large amount of history. As for history, he mentions both the good and the bad, such as various great artists that contribute to the culture of Detroit, as well as racial issues (Paget), which the city has struggled with a lot. In the interview, Cage mentions that the people of Detroit are “full of energy and they're struggling and they're fighting, but they're revitalizing this city in a very interesting way” (Paget). The people and the history of the city combined therefore made a great case for why the game should be set exactly there.

Detroit can, when taking into account the interview with Cage, definitely be considered to be a city that must have a lot of history. Given that Cage himself, as well as the rest of the team behind the videogame, seem to have given the location a lot of thought, it is interesting to dive further into just how they have managed to portray the things that they might have seen when they were in Detroit, looking for inspiration for the game. The city of Detroit has been through many troublesome periods over the past one hundred years with many financial, political, and cultural ups and downs, which have all played a part in shaping Detroit into the city that it is today, and the city that inspired Cage to use the city as the setting of his videogame.

## Economic downfall

Back in the 1930's, America was a productive, industrial giant (Boggs, Kurashige 74), yet due to following decades of depopulation, disinvestment, financial mismanagement, and political marginalization, Detroit filed for bankruptcy on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, 2013 (Sugrue). Leading up to this filing for bankruptcy is a long history of struggle for both the city as well as the people of Detroit, seemingly starting rather suddenly around the 1940's and 1950's, and lasting all the way up to the

21<sup>st</sup> century, resulting in the city inspiring works such as *Detroit: Become Human* to create imaginary worlds based on its struggles.

The car manufacturing industry was booming in America in the 1940's, and Detroit especially seemed to be what Thomas Sugrue calls "the heartbeat of the industrial metropolis" at the time (Sugrue). After the end of World War 2 through the beginning of the 1960's, Detroit was the leading car manufacturing site in both America as well as the whole world (Shor 85), and was actually considered the manufacturing capital of America (Skrabec 135), until everything suddenly went downhill fast (Shor 85). In the 1950's, America was the supplier of almost 80 percent of the cars in the world (Skrabec 135). Already during the 1960's, the amount had gone down to half of the cars in the world (High 128), and in 1982, this number had dropped all the way to just 18 percent (High 128) as a result of the deindustrialization which hit the American Midwest hard.

The main reasons behind so many people losing their jobs was that the big plants especially were quickly replacing workers with automated machines, and they were beginning to move their business out of Detroit, neither of these being options for the smaller companies, who could not keep up with the pace that the big plants were going at (Shor 86). Another reason behind the many firings of workers and closing of plants was the fact that American workers were generally paid a higher wage than e.g. the Japanese, who were also good at producing automobiles. To top it all off, the Japanese companies also had more robot technology to aid in the production, which resulted in the Japanese being able to produce twice as many cars and car parts with just half the labor, and at half the cost (Skrabec 135). As a result of all of this, Detroit lost a total of 134,000 manufacturing jobs between 1947 and 1963, though the population of men and women of working age increased through this period (Sugrue). This massive decrease in the workforce in Detroit makes its appearance in *Detroit: Become Human* as well. If the player makes Kara turn on the television in Todd's bedroom, the player will be able to see a news program where the news anchor informs the viewers of the fact that unemployment is at an all-time high, saying that "Another 225,000 jobs were lost from the US economy in October, according to the Department of Labor, bringing the unemployment figure up to 37.3%". In another example, on his way back from picking up paints for his owner, Markus also comes across the issue of unemployment, as some protestors are protesting against how the androids have taken over many workplaces, rendering many of the city's inhabitants out of a job. These protestors eventually get rather violent towards him, calling him a tin can and pushing him around as they cuss him out for stealing their jobs, threatening to "fuck his bitch ass up" (*Detroit: Become Human*).

With all the pressure that the people of Detroit had been feeling through the years of deindustrialization, around the 1960's it seemed to become too much, as much picketing, marching and organizing was done by Detroiters wanting just treatment and better conditions of life in the city. Likewise, many young Detroiters took to the streets, rebelling against both the growing sense of being replaced by automation in the workplaces as well as the racism and brutality of the predominantly white police force, though the media often called these rebellions "riots" (Boggs, Kurashige 75), which, as mentioned, can be seen happening in the videogame as well.

## Drugs

Due to the increasing societal issues, thousands of young people began dropping out of high school to try their luck selling drugs. This created a rolling drug economy which ended up resulting in an enormous increase of violence and homicides. The year after crack cocaine came into Detroit, 43 children lost their lives and 365 were wounded (Boggs, Kurashige 76), mainly due to the drug trade. With the war on drugs going on during this time, there was a dramatic increase in arrests, which resulted in a great increase in the amount spent on law enforcement, imprisonment, and criminal justice (Sugrue), resulting in the availability of even fewer funds to try to help the city out of its rapid decline.

In *Detroit: Become Human*, drugs are also very prevalent in the world, with Red Ice being the main drug causing tremendous problems in Detroit in 2038. All of the three playable androids are exposed to the existence of the drug during the game, though some more than others. Kara's owner, Todd, is seen doing drugs on the couch only shortly after returning from having retrieved her from having been repaired at the android the store, though the player does not know what the drug is yet. Leo, the son of the artist Carl, who owns Markus, asks for money from his father early on in the game. It quickly becomes apparent that what the son needs money for is drugs, as Carl asks him whether he is "on it" again. However, up until this point, the player still does not know that the drugs in question is one drug in particular. The first time the player is properly introduced to the drug, which is called "Red Ice", is on the first job Connor is sent on with police Lieutenant Hank Anderson, where a drug addict is stabbed to death by his deviant android. Connor scans the crime scene, where he might come across the drug, but the player is not yet told much of the implications that this certain type of drug has on the world of the game. The magnitude of the problem becomes more apparent further on in the game where the player can make Connor go through some files on the Lieutenant, where it becomes apparent that Hank was part of a case of dismantling a large network of Red Ice dealers

leading to over 50 arrests throughout the US. An article that the player might find on Hank's computer states that "Detroit's finest has dealt a massive blow to the city's growing red ice epidemic, with a number of high-profile dealers and suppliers now behind bars and narcotics seized with a street value of \$500,000.". Another article states that nearly a ton of red ice was discovered in the hold of a boat. The drug problem can also be seen in paratexts, such as the front page of a magazine, which can be found at a point in the game, which has the headline "RED ICE EPIDEMIC: The latest narcotic crisis to ravage Detroit".

The above-mentioned articles all paint a clear picture in regards to just how severe the drug problem is in the secondary world of the game, especially when considering all the encounters that the characters have with drugs as well, and how these encounters tend to pan out. Aside from the many available news stories about the drug, the player also encounters several unfortunate stories in which Red Ice has played a massive part, such as Todd's wife leaving him because of his drug addiction and lack of stable job, or Hank telling Connor about the loss of his son, which was ultimately the result of a doctor who was drugged up on Red Ice and incapable of performing a proper surgery on the boy after the car crash he was involved in. It is clear that, given how often the player encounters the drug throughout the game, there are clear connections to be drawn between the secondary world of the game and the Primary World of the player, as there are constant wars on drugs going on around the world, not only in Detroit. In an article in *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*, it is stated that a resurgence of Heroin use in the U.S. has been reported since the 2000's, occurring especially among young, white people in the suburbs and more rural areas (Draus et al.). Due to how the drugs are portrayed in the game, it can also be argued that the author's own philosophy in regards to drugs and drug addiction is rather visible in both the storyline and in the world itself, as the clear problems shown around drug abuse sends a rather clear message to the player that nothing good comes out of doing drugs.

## ○ Racial tensions and the treatment of people of color

As for race, people of color have not had it easy in Detroit through the years. In the mid 1940's, one-third of the workers at the Ford River Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan were black. However, as the number of workers dwindled, it was especially black workers that bore the brunt of the firings (Shor 86). This number fluctuated greatly throughout the next few decades as e.g. many black people lost their jobs at Chrysler during the recession in the 1950's, yet in the 60's, Chrysler began hiring people once again, allowing in a lot of younger, black workers to do some of the dirty,

more dangerous jobs in its now rather run-down factories (Shor 87). The amount of work being provided to people of color over white workers, as well as with the plants being relocated and many workers being let go, it was mainly white families that fled to the suburbs, leaving Detroit itself to become predominantly black. However, by the 1960's, the police force in Detroit was predominantly white, and though the black population was growing, the city and the schools were still almost exclusively governed by white people (Boggs, Kurashige 75), causing a great worry in the black community. The events back then, which have seemingly continued in one way or another, is still affecting the city as it is today both in regards to race as well as class. The main inhabitants of Detroit in the year 2010 were either working-class or poor people of color, most of these people, just over 82 percent of the 717,000 total residents, being African American. Actually, in 2010, only 7,8 percent of people living in Detroit were white (Sugrue). Where the population of Detroit had once been prominently white, with 1,4 million residents in 1978 being white out of a total of 1,8 million residents, this number was only 100,000 in 2019 (High 128), as most white people had left Detroit due to the decline of the city. Though there is a general abundance of white non-playable human characters, as for the main characters, there is a representation of both females and people of color, as aside from the typical white male character, one character is a white female and one is a colored male.

### Detroit today

It is quite clear that even after the 2000's, Detroit still has not been able to recover from the many years of deindustrialization. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, times have continued to be hard on Detroit. After the beginning of the economic collapse in 2007, the unemployment rate quickly increased, hitting its peak in 2009 at nearly 25 percent, though this did decrease to just above 16 percent in 2013, whereas just over 36 percent of the population of Detroit still lived beneath the poverty line (Sugrue). However, despite the downwards spiral that Detroit has been in for so long, there are people who are attempting to turn things around for the city. Up until 2012, the year in which Boggs and Kurashige wrote their book *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty First Century*, many different networks, youth programs and overall organizations had been set in motion (Boggs, Kurashige 80) as the citizens of Detroit kept fighting to restore their city to a greatness like what it had been before the chaos that was brought onto it by deindustrialization and drug trade. With the hard work of its citizens, Detroit has since been getting a rather significant urban agricultural movement, providing the residents with fresh, nutritious food, economic development,

community stabilization, and much more (Boggs, Kurashige 84), showing that Detroit is clearly headed for a much brighter future.

While some people merely focus on the negative aspects of the city, some have a more positive view on the future of Detroit, such as Boggs, who in 2012 wrote that Detroit was a city of hope rather than a city of despair (Boggs, Kurashige 74), as she believed that while the deindustrialization in Detroit caused great devastation and depopulation, practically turning the city into a wasteland, it also created something useful: a space in which it was both possible and necessary to create a city based on values beyond the expansion of production, but on values of community and sustainability. She believes that Detroit has been granted the opportunity to start fresh, saying that “In its dying, Detroit could also be the birthplace of a new city” (Shor 89). Cage’s portrayal of Detroit in the videogame can be said to have been inspired by this struggle to improve the city and fight for its survival, and its imagined improvements in Cage’s imaginary world are clear to see in how the world has been constructed. When considering the *mise-en-scène*, which spans over everything visible to the camera, such as e.g. the setting, the costumes, the acting, the lighting and the composition of all of these elements (Christensen et al. 21), it is clear to see the portrayal of a Detroit which is thriving in some places but at the same time struggling to stay afloat in others.



The street Todd lives on (Detroit: Become Human).

In the cinematic sequence following the returning of Kara to Todd, the player sees cinematic shots from the drive back to Todd's home, where *mise-en-scène* elements such as setting, lighting and costumes in this sequence shows a clear difference between the different parts of the city. At the beginning of the sequence, it is shown on a sign by a busy highway as they move towards the city that Detroit is called "the android city". The sequence then proceeds to show busy streets, tall buildings, high-tech machines and billboards, beautiful green scenery, and big, busy-looking industrial areas. The sequence likewise shows a time-lapse of the many citizens of Detroit, humans and androids alike, walking through the highly technological streets, as well as the many technology-run vehicles driving around them. However, while Detroit for a moment seems to be a thriving city entirely full of life and work opportunities, the player is suddenly shown the more ominous side to the city, as a homeless man is seen sitting on the sidewalk with a sign saying "I lost my job because of ANDROIDS!! Help me". This mix of the new and the old continues on as the player is introduced to the suburbs in which Todd lives. The music turns more somber and the skies turn darker as the player sees the neighborhood, abandoned and burnt down houses mixed in with the run-down houses still lived in. The house in which Todd lives, as well as the houses surrounded it, is clearly quite run-down, and all around the neighborhood, it seems that construction work is going on, a sign saying "REBUILD NORTH CORKTOWN" showing an attempt to bring more life to the run-down part of town. The inside of Todd's house looks as bad as the outside, generally run-down and also littered with garbage, take-away, and beer bottles. Once again, the player is shown the line between the old and new, and the struggle of attempting to improve on the run-down part of town. Even just one look at the character of Todd shows his greasy, slicked back hair, dark circles around his eyes, and several spots on his well-worn clothes. All of these aspects of the *mise-en-scène* adds together to show the player the Detroit of the secondary world, which seems to have been influenced rather substantially by Cage's view of the Detroit of the Primary World.

Secondary worlds are of course created with the purpose of entertainment, though they are also often used to comment on the Primary World, causing the audience to view it slightly differently due to the secondary worlds' history, themes, aesthetics, locations, design, purposes, and the stories told within them (Wolf 65). Along with the interviews with Cage as well as Wolf's argument that the secondary world is meant to entertain the player as well as comment on aspects of the Primary World, it would seem very likely that the secondary world of Detroit, while of course having been updated technologically to fit the science fictionesque future that is posed in the game, many aspects of the world are very similar to the Detroit in our Primary World today.



Whereas some androids decide to stay in Detroit and fight for their freedom, Kara, Luther and Alice decide to make a break for Canada, a place where they will be able to be free. There could be several different reasons behind why Canada is posed as being “the land of the free”, though. It could perhaps be because Canada might have a different history than that of Detroit and the United States, or perhaps the government during the creation of the game seemed more openminded towards non-Caucasians. It can be hard to say for certain what the creators’ thought processes have been if they have not specified it themselves, but given that Cage seemingly has put a lot of thought into which city was to be the main stage of the game, it would make sense that at least some thought had gone into picking the country to which many of the androids would attempt to escape to. Therefore, it is relevant to delve a bit deeper into the history of Canada.

While the factories in U.S. cities such as Detroit suffered greatly in the last half of the 1900’s, Canada suffered under the closing of many manufacturing plants as well. However, through the workers protesting, wrapping themselves in Canadian flags and occupying the closing plants, the politicians actually created laws to help such workers in the future, including advance notice regarding mass layoffs, preferential hiring rights, pension reinsurance, and severance pay (High 146). Canada therefore seems to have historically done somewhat better in regards to workers’ rights, even though the factories and therefore also the workers suffered greatly.

In *Detroit: Become Human*, the player can find information about the game’s version of Canada scattered throughout the entire playthrough. The front page of a magazine states that Canada is an android-free zone, meaning that while androids are technically not welcome into the country, it also means that the production and enslavement of this free labor is also not condoned by the country, possibly making it seem like a good place to escape to. According to statistics, it is clear to see that there is a difference in homicide rates between America and Canada, as in 2018, there were roughly 1.76 homicides per 100.000 residents in Canada versus a significantly larger 5.3 in the U.S (Canada and United States homicide rate 2018). Where America would appear to have a slightly higher average income than Canada, they also have a much higher poverty rate of families with children, 45.3 percent to Canada’s 23.3 percent (Card, Freeman 192). It may be due to some of these differences between the countries that Cage decided to make Canada the land of the free. Given that Cage is French, however, he has most likely not experienced the social and political differences between America and Canada himself, meaning that his portrayal of the differences between the countries is

most likely not based on personal experience. The way he has constructed the world of the game, then, would imply that it may have been influenced by his own perhaps slightly colored vision of the two countries.

### Worldbuilding in the game

According to Wolf, the boundaries are normally rather distinct between the secondary and the Primary World, though he believes that in one way or another, all secondary worlds somewhat resemble or reflect the Primary World, as it would not be easy for the audience to relate to it if this was not the case (Wolf 62), which would imply that to analyze the secondary world of a game, it is important to first understand the aspects of Primary World of the audience which might have influenced the creation of the fictional world.

Wolf argues that “World-building is often something that occurs as a background activity, allowing storytelling to remain in the foreground of the audience’s experience” (Wolf 30), meaning that the audience might not consider the creation of the world itself much, as they tend to be more taken by the storytelling in the work. According to Fernández-Vara, explaining the basic functions that make up the secondary world sets expectations for the player in regards to the world, given that every world has different events, agents, and actions associated with them (Fernández-Vara 116). The player might therefore be able to categorize the game in a certain genre, or simply just get an idea of what the basics of the game is before playing the game, even though they might not consciously consider the world-building. Wolf does mention that world-building might sometimes overtake storytelling, however, which can be seen in the creation of works outside of the game, such as wikipediaes or books that go beyond the work itself, delving far deeper into the worldbuilding than what would be strictly necessary for the story of the work to function. This rather more extensive worldbuilding can also be seen in in-game paratexts (Wolf 30) where the player e.g. encounters backstories that aid in the world-building, though these may not be strictly necessary to furthering the plot and storyline of the work. In games, this is often seen in e.g. journals or books, such as in *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*, where the player can read about the world of Cyrodiil through books and journal entries that can be found all across the world. These types of in-game paratexts occur often in *Detroit: Become Human*, where the playable androids can come across magazines lying about here and there throughout the game, which the player can choose to pick up and read through. In these magazines, the player can read about current or past news stories revolving the world, or read through commercials for products available for purchase in the world of the game. While these texts are not

actually necessary to the storyline of the game, they do help build the world up around the story, immersing the player even further into the story as they engage with the paratexts that provide further knowledge and context to what is happening in the world of the game.



Detroit as seen in the cinematic sequence introducing the game to the player (*Detroit: Become Human*).

As Wolf mentioned, the secondary world is always influenced by the Primary World in one way or another, making it possible for the audience to relate to the world, its events, its characters, etc., though he believes that the secondary world usually has a very distinct border between it and the Primary World, as this aids in separating the two worlds from each other, though the audience is usually provided with some sort of indication of where the characters in the secondary world are in relation to where the audience in the Primary World are (Wolf 62-63). In his dissertation, Robert Buerkle likewise argues that diegetic worlds, the known world of the videogame, might seem vastly different from the Primary World, yet it might also appear to be very closely similar to the world that the audience or player knows (Buerkle 160). This can be seen in *Detroit: Become Human* in how the game does take place in a city which all of its players are familiar with, at least to some extent, which makes it easy for them to relate to the world as well as its events and character. Wolf likewise points out that temporal connections also hold much importance in relation to worlds, as no matter if they have alternate histories or imagined time periods, many stories are often set in the past or the future where they are still linked to our place in history somehow, yet still out of reach for the audience.

This is especially true for science fiction works, as they are often set in the future, but usually hold some form of link to the Primary World of the viewer so as to be able to make the story easily understandable. As for temporal connections in *Detroit: Become Human*, it is stated in the game that the year is 2038, which sets the secondary world apart time-wise from the Primary World in which the player is currently playing the game in, despite the game being set in a city that is known in it. The fact that the year of the story is stated as well as the fact that the city is undoubtedly more modern and high-tech than that of Detroit in the Primary World, consisting of automatically driven taxis as well as very human-like androids, clearly helps setting the two worlds apart, even though they in some ways seem so similar to each other. No matter how aware the player is of the Detroit of the Primary World, as well as the history of the city, the player has an easier time relating to the Detroit of the secondary world.

Detroit is imagined as a quasi-mythical locale in its portrayal of Detroit: a revived, industrial city. The future of Detroit is somewhat romanticized, as it portrays a colorful city center, a sharp contrast to its real-life version. It is not just a renewed Detroit that the player sees; the game also reflects the city's past – our present. (Pettersen 37).

For a secondary world to exist, three basic structures are needed. A secondary world needs a space for things to exist and events to take place in, a span of time in which these events can take place, and one or more characters or beings who inhabit the world. These three basic structures are almost always present at least to some degree within an imagined world (Wolf 154), and can also be seen in *Detroit: Become Human*. The story occurs, as already mentioned, in Detroit, Michigan in the year 2038. The span of time for the unfolding events span from Connor's first mission on August 15<sup>th</sup> to Markus' speech to his people on November 12<sup>th</sup>. The inhabitants of the world are both humans and androids, of which three androids are the playable main characters with both androids and humans as non-playable side characters. Therefore, all three of the basic structures are filled in the game. Aside from those three, Wolf argues that there are five additional structures that might be seen in an imaginary world, which is nature, culture, language, mythology and philosophy (Wolf 155), though these are not always as common as the first three.

It can be argued that all the different of the additional structures can be found in *Detroit: Become Human*, at least to some extent, yet the most prominent and most important of these last five structures is for this game especially culture, mythology and philosophy. Culture provides a link between nature and history and is most often central to whatever unique situation that supplies the

story with a certain issue or conflict. When an imaginary world has an invented culture, it is easier for the author to get their point across, as they can tailor this culture as they wish, without having to worry about sticking with an already existing culture from the Primary World (Wolf 179-180). However, a work can sometimes contain a variety of different cultural and historical references to those that are tied to the Primary world, its storyline will, despite these connections to real world politics and culture, not necessarily depict these stories completely as they may have occurred in the Primary World, suggesting instead a variation on the Primary World's world history (Buerkle 19-20). This blending of Primary World and secondary world culture, politics and history are, as previously stated, also often a big part of science fiction works, as it becomes easier for the audience to follow the storyline of such a work if there are similarities in culture, politics or history. According to Wolf, while the cultures in secondary worlds often have origin stories that involve the history of the world, these origin stories also tend to involve character arcs over the course of the story (Wolf 183). The aspects of character and character arcs are therefore also rather important when discussing cultures in secondary worlds, though this is something this thesis will touch upon in a later segment.

Mythology can provide a secondary world with history and context, providing both backstories for settings and events taking place in the world, as well as providing a connection between present characters and events with those of the past, possibly providing an idea of the changes that may have occurred in the world (Wolf 189-192). This often reveals to the audience how the problems in the world came to be, or how the characters themselves came to be, giving more meaning to the story events, completing long character arcs, or putting an end to age-old conflicts. Therefore, it can be said that mythologies provide both historical depth as well as explanations and purpose behind the events that occur in an imaginary world (Wolf 189).

While mythology in Wolf's book mainly focuses on providing history and context behind mythical or supernatural beings such as the many strange creatures that appear in works like *Lord of the Rings* or *Star Wars*, or works from Lovecraft or Dunsany (Wolf 190-192), with mythology providing backstories for settings and events taking place in the worlds, it can be argued that it applies just as much to a game such as *Detroit: Become Human*, at it can just as well describe the history and context behind such well-developed, highly technological, human-looking androids being such a big part of society.

Philosophical outlooks can be shown in many different ways through a work, be it through a direct comment from the author, through the point of view of a character, through actions and consequences that may be connected to them, through punishments or lack of such for crimes, and many other ways (Wolf 192). In *Detroit: Become Human*, there are many examples that show how the philosophy of the author shines through. It can be said that there is a clear, culturally related message from the author in regards to a philosophy on how to treat other beings, no matter their gender, color or species, as one of the most important, reoccurring issues in the game is the difference between humans and androids and the way humans treat these ‘lesser’ beings. This topic is touched upon continuously through the game, sometimes more obviously than others. When the character Markus is walking through a square in the city, the observant player might catch a human walking by an android garbage-worker, throwing a piece of trash in the direction of the android who is sweeping the leaves on the ground. He also passes by a man speaking angrily about the androids to a small crowd of people, saying that “We built these androids to be our slaves” (*Detroit: Become Human*). While this quote and these actions show a certain disregard for these ‘lesser’, non-human beings, it also shows clear references to the slavery that used to take place all over the world in the Primary World only a few hundred years ago.

When taking into account how Mark Robson argued that history and text is intertwined, looking at the worldbuilding of the secondary world of *Detroit: Become Human* in contrast to the Primary World of the player should provide several examples of the connection between the two worlds. As already mentioned, it can be argued that the viewpoints and philosophies of Cage are visible throughout the game, as New Historicists believe that the author’s place in society, culture and history can have great influence on a work. Likewise, each player might experience and understand the game differently depending on their societal, cultural, and historical influences. Therefore, making use of the thick description coined by Geertz, which New Historicists believe to be a powerful tool in understanding history, is important in order to grasp even just some of the historical, cultural and social influences that may appear in the game.

In *Detroit: Become Human*, power is a large factor that plays in throughout the game, and it can be seen in many different places. Aside from the clear power imbalance between the humans and the androids, one big example of power is the power held by large companies. The example here would be the CyberLife company, which seems to be apparent everywhere the player looks. Not only does CyberLife create androids that look like humans, selling them as mere servants to the people of America, working in any job ranging from soldiers to maids to convenience store clerks, but they also

create android animals. Through in-game paratexts such as magazines and the news, it is stated that CyberLife has been opening several zoos around the country, filling them with hundreds of extinct animals that they have recreated through their android technology. Likewise, a magazine can be found in which the headline reads “IS YOUR ANDROID SPYING ON YOU?”, stating that Cyberlife could be using its androids to collect private information. This sounds very similar to issues that we face in the Primary World today with Google, Amazon Alexa, and many other companies and products that we are wary of due to the risk of being spied on by these large companies wanting to profit off of their customers despite rules and regulations.

Another example of where power can be seen is through the power that the government holds, deciding over the little guy, who in this case is both the humans and the androids, though most of the focus is, of course, on the androids. Depending on the society, history and culture that the player has been influenced by, the camps that the government calls for the construction of might, to some players, bring back memories of hearing about concentration camps in World War II. This combined with the slavery of the androids seen throughout the game, would give what most would feel were clear connections to the slavery of people of color, which most players will have heard about to some extent throughout their lives, no matter what society, history or culture they are generally a part of.

## Humans vs androids

When discussing a topic such as humans and androids, it is important to try to understand what the difference even is between the two, as well as what future we might be headed towards technologically, how the future of the post-21<sup>st</sup> century might change this separation between humans and androids, and how fast this change might occur. This part of the analysis will therefore make an attempt at explaining the use we have of robots today as well as where this might be situated in the future. In order to fully delve into this, the topics of android theory, posthumanism and transhumanism are valuable topics to understand and analyze in order to understand some of the views that people might have on technology and androids today, as well as how Cage’s views on the future of technology comes to show through the game.

Antonie Marie Bodley argues that as technology keeps advancing, androids will begin playing a progressively more prominent role in the everyday lives of mankind, stating that they will “have a profound effect on our inner self and our homes” (Bodley 2). Such a thought could very well be shared by many others, no matter whether they expect this effect to be good or bad. The topic of

technology, robots and androids in general is a widely debated topic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as we see more and more automation both in the workplace and in society in general. More efficient robotics are replacing actual workers, and technology is making its way into everything that we own at home through automation and artificial intelligence. This development has led several authors and theorists to develop the term “Android Theory” as a way to understand this posthumanist, transhumanist future that many believe we are headed towards, as well as to understand exactly how and why we are headed in this direction.

Bodley argues that androids are somewhat “queer” in the sense that they do not really fit into either the human or nonhuman category due to them not being fully human due to their construction, but also not seeming entirely nonhuman as they are designed appearance-wise to fit in amongst humanity in a way that is more comfortable to humans (Bodley 2). This is obviously seen in *Detroit: Become Human* as the androids are created to look exactly like humans, but are not designed to function fully as them given that they have not been programmed to have emotions or free will. Additionally, Bodley argues that “this attempt to “pass” within the populations of humanity, suggests another aspect of androids’ queerness which reaches into theories of mind, body and society.” (Bodley 3). Her argument of passing within the human population then raises the question of what it means to be human, whether humanity lies in the mind, the body or the society.

Throughout the entire game, as the name of the game implies, the player is faced with this question of what it means to be human as well as where the line goes between human and machine. In the beginning, all three of the playable androids are simply just machines that obey the word of their owner. Despite a man such as Carl Manfred treating Markus like an individual, encouraging him to make decisions for himself, his programming ensures that this is not entirely possible. However, as the game progresses, the three androids eventually break through their programming, suddenly beginning to show a more human side to themselves. As for Kara, she grows to love Alice, wanting to do anything she can to protect the girl. Markus becomes very righteous, wanting to fight for the right for all androids to be free, and even possibly falling in love with another android, North, along the way. As for Connor, the process of breaking through his programming is a much slower, more tedious task, yet with every ‘human’ choice the player makes, Connor’s system instability will increase, eventually giving the player the option to break Connor free from his programming and instead help the deviants win their freedom. The fact that the androids resemble humans so much both on the outside with their removable skin, but also on the inside with their biocomponents that are somewhat similar to human organs, makes it hard to tell them apart from humans based on looks

alone. As soon as the little LED light on their temple is removed, there is no way to tell them apart from humans, unless one was to check their temperature, which is what they end up doing at the border to Canada to ensure that no androids come into the country.

Tanya Pettersen argues that throughout the game, “the player is compelled to decide “what is human?” to create instances where it is difficult to see the characters other than individuals; not only by making them look like human beings but also by giving them the ability to display empathy and emotion” (54). If the player chooses an empathetic approach to playing as the androids, these androids will become more empathetic and more human-like as the game progresses. When considering Bodley’s description of androids attempting to pass into humanity in both body, mind and society, it would seem that the androids in *Detroit: Become Human*, given that they already look like exact replicas of humans, and now also being able to be empathetic, would certainly be one step closer to humanity. Yet, while there are certainly many similarities between androids and humans, the similarities increasing and becoming more apparent as the game progresses, it would seem that one of the major similarities actually lies in the historical treatment of people who were once believed to be ‘lesser’, though these aspects will be further investigated in the coming sections of this thesis.

## ○ Android theory, posthumanism and transhumanism

In our Primary World of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, technological advancements are a natural part of our lives. New products are constantly released, and experimentations regarding artificial intelligence is a topic which is widely discussed in these modern times. Futurist Jim Dator poses some ideas of how our future will look, arguing that in the future, “humanity is about to be surrounded by all kinds of novel intelligent beings that will demand, and may or may not receive, our respect and admiration” (Bodley 8), meaning that the way technology is advancing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century might result in the creation of sentient beings; an outcome to technological advancements that we would then have to deal with eventually.

When considering the topic of androids and their developments as well as their place in the society of our Primary World in the 2020’s, the topics of posthumanism and especially transhumanism are quite valid topics to consider. In Bodley’s work, *The android and our cyborg selves*, she investigates the topic of androids through what she calls android theory, drawing on several different fields of study such as film studies, American studies, literary studies, and philosophy, and combining these with theories of posthumanity, the explorations of cyborgs and the philosophies of transhumanism (1-3). Whereas in cultural studies, the posthuman has generally only

been explored with humans as the focus, she proposes the same approach yet with the android in focus instead, referring to this as android theory, arguing that “this research seeks to explore the figure of the android to form a vocabulary that can extrapolate to a future allowing for a (post)human self, able to live and interact within communities of actual androids and other potential entities that we cannot even imagine at this time.” (Bodley 3-4).

In relation to android theory, Bodley mentions both posthumanism and transhumanism, two philosophies regarding the future of mankind. Transhumanism, originally coined as a philosophy by two British scholars within different fields of study, Julian Huxley and Max More (Vita-More 51), “generally refers to a philosophy, a world-view regarding the direction of technology development and the nature of the human condition” (Bodley 4). The theory itself is somewhat resembling of humanism, which considers humans to naturally deserve a place at the center of things, distinguishing themselves from animals, machines, and other non-human entities, considering humans to be “exceptional, autonomous, and set above the world that lies at their feet” (Badmington 347). The word “transhuman” itself was actually first seen many years prior to Huxley making a philosophy of it in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in the fourteenth century, where it was used to describe “the change of the human body to immortal flesh in eschatology” (Lee 4). Natasha Vita-More explains that transhumanism is, at the core, “the conviction that the lifespan be extended, aging reversed, and that death should be optional rather than compulsory”. Additionally, transhumanism also proposes the use of nanotechnology to resolve environmental issues, genetic engineering to diminish diseases, artificial intelligence to help improve decision-making on the human level, and molecular manufacturing to put an end to poverty (49). When considering the previously mentioned hierarchy of machine to human, transhumanists would most likely argue that cyborgs would be on top of this hierarchal chain due to their belief that the technological enhancement of humans is a necessary and celebrated aspect of the future.

Whereas transhumanism suggests exceeding and going beyond the human, posthumanism is, according to Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter “characterized by a radical futurology that celebrates the provisionality of the human in the seemingly steady and irreversible movement towards evolved and enhanced versions of humanity” (144). Posthumanism is, according to Bodley, a form of opposition to the transhumanist promises of a future utopia, attempting to resist the appeal of these utopian promises (4). Posthumanists tend to avoid thinking of man as being the dominant, privileged center of the world, as humans are no different from animals or machines, or any other forms of inhuman objects for that matter (Badmington 347).

Transhumanists generally seem to be of the belief that democracy needs to be saved from its demise, wanting to provide alternatives to the political structures as they are seen today through knowledge and thoroughly considered solutions (Vita-More 59), resulting in transhumanism attempting to embed itself in U.S. politics especially. In 2015, version 1.0 of the transhumanist Bill of Rights was finished, containing the Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, but revised to encompass a future involving a wider range of species and technological advancements (Lee 18-19). The full transhumanist Bill of Rights, having been revised a few times since 2015, can be found on the official website of the U.S. Transhumanist Party. The 43 articles of the transhumanist Bill of Rights includes equal rights for all sentient beings, freedom to attempt to live forever, and the right to a good living standard, accessible education and affordable medical aid. Its focus lies very much on the prospect of living forever, completely avoiding disease, increasing knowledge and bettering technology and the understanding of science and the universe (U.S. Transhumanist Party). It seemingly wills for all sentient entities to live together in peace and prosperity, posing an almost utopian idea of the future of the United States, assuming the existence of extraterrestrial beings as well as sentient plants and animals and assuming the possibility of genetically altering the body to become immortal. It also seems to assume the capability of the country to provide housing, food, education, etc. at a price affordable to everyone, despite arguing the possibility that there might be no need for sentient workers in the future (U.S. Transhumanist Party).

It should be explained that the transhumanist website considers the commonly used term “sentient beings” as encompassing: Humans, including genetically modified ones; cyborgs; digital intelligences; intellectually enhanced animals; plants and animals that have been enhanced to be capable of intelligent thoughts; and other advanced sapient lifeforms (U.S. Transhumanist Party). It might seem like a far-fetched belief to many that even plants are supposed to be capable of being sentient one day, but transhumanists seem to be of the belief that it is fully possible for man to eventually create or come across such a thing. In *Detroit: Become Human*, the player does also see several android animals, though these are not known to have been intellectually enhanced in the sense that transhumanists would consider enough for them to be sentient beings. The birds in Carl’s home seem to behave like completely normal birds except for the fact that they have an on/off button. The most sentient android animal the player might come across is the caged polar bear at Zlatko’s house. When Kara and Alice attempt to escape the house, the player might be faced with the option to let the bear loose. It chooses not to attack Kara and Alice, but if Zlatko enters the room, the polar bear will

fiercely try to attack him, allowing the two to run away in the meantime, almost seeming to wish to help those that helped it escape.

One of the big influences to transhumanism is Ray Kurzweil, who is well-known for having promoted the knowledge of “The Singularity”, which is, in short, the belief that artificial intelligence will outpace human ability as a result of “the exponential growth of computer programming speed” (Bodley 9). In 2005, Kurzweil wrote the book *The Singularity is Near* in which he argued the effects that the rapid pace of technological change will eventually have on humanity, believing that this new epoch will undoubtedly change the current concepts that we as humans depend on in order to give meaning to our lives, which includes anything from certain business models to the cycle of human life from birth until death (Lee 7).

This belief that technology has a much more exponential growth than the human race is also apparent in some of the characters in *Detroit: Become Human*. Markus’ owner, Carl, seems to be very aware of the differences between humans and androids, how human bodies deteriorate faster and are much more fragile, as well as how androids do not need to learn new abilities such as piano-playing, simply seeming to be able to do it if asked to, mentioning the differences between humans and machines several times throughout the entirety of the game. In the sequence called “The Painter”, after serving Carl his breakfast, Markus is asked to find something to do while he eats. If the player chooses to watch the news, in which the news anchor is discussing a looming World War III, Carl will say: “5,000 years of civilization just to get to where we are...” (Detroit: Become Human), hinting to the idea of the Singularity, in which human development is happening at a much slower pace than that of technology.

The topic of transhumanism is something that seems to have influenced David Cage at least to some extent as he wrote the story for *Detroit: Become Human*. In an interview with Games Radar, Cage mentions having been inspired by another work created by Kurzweil, *Humanity 2.0*, in which Kurzweil explains the slow pace at which human intelligence grows in comparison to the general learning curve of machines which is much faster. Cage argues that “Who knows if one day they will have emotions? We may be in this strange situation, like in [Detroit], where we’ll have machines that look exactly like us, are more intelligent than us, and maybe feel emotion. How will we deal with them?” (Simpkins). Considering this quote, it would appear that Cage does draw from Kurzweil’s theories as well as transhumanist theories in general when it comes to the possibility of machines being sentient in the future. However, instead of these sentient beings being allowed equal rights in

the game from the beginning, as they would in the Primary World if transhumanists were to decide, Cage shows the importance of the views of the transhumanists who wish for equal rights among all sentient beings. Dator's questioning of what the future may look like and how we might deal with the outcome of our rapidly advancing technology sounds rather similar to the questions that Cage poses in the interview, and these questions are also clearly seen in the game itself.

Being alive is making choices. Between love and hate, between holding out your hand or closing it as a fist... I don't have any easy answers, Markus. You have to accept the world as it is... or fight to change it. (Detroit: Become Human).

There are many human characters in the game that hold a strong dislike towards androids and artificial intelligence technology, such as the protestors arguing that the androids are taking all their jobs. Other human characters, however, such as Carl, acknowledge and celebrate the differences between humans and androids. While arguing that humans are fragile beings that break down easily, Carl might likewise tell Markus that the world is ruled by the fear of others and the fear of the future. It can be said that Carl is the main voice of reason in the game, arguing from the beginning that it is important to treat others well, no matter their race, and to not let anyone else tell you who you are. He shows the player the importance of being an openminded person making space for all types of beings, no matter what they are made up of, seeming to embrace this recent development in technology that allows for the creation of incredibly human-like androids.

In the game, the development in technology, while sometimes being portrayed as a wonderful, impressive thing, is not only shown to be as wholly positive of an influence to society as transhumanists seem to believe technological development to be. This can be seen in both the historical context of the worldbuilding itself as well as how the city of Detroit is built, but especially also in the representation in the characters, how they are portrayed, how they are treated, and what connections can be seen between the androids of the game and minorities of the Primary World of the player.

## ○ Representation and the treatment of androids

In a game with such a vast amount of worldbuilding and storytelling, the characters that appear through it are very important as they are perfect vehicles with which to represent certain aspects of culture, society and history which the author might wish to portray through a work. Therefore, in this section of the analysis, the different characters will be investigated further in an attempt to understand how they are built, how they develop through the storyline, as well as what, or whom, they might be argued to be representing. Likewise, the possibility of a historical and socio-cultural context to aspects such as slavery and segregation or drug abuse and class difference will be delved into along with how this possible context is shown throughout the game, whether it be through the actions of the playable characters, through actions of non-playable characters, or possibly through the humans' treatment of the general android population.

Interpretation of characters is a fundamental feature of human behavior. Even with limited information available, people will assign personality – even to inanimate objects. Characters in computer games will be attributed personality based on their appearance and behavior. The interpretation of these characters affects the whole game experience (Lankoski et al. 1).

According to Espen Aarseth, one of the most important dimensions in storytelling in games is that of the characters of the game (Aarseth 1), as through the playable character, sometimes referred to as avatar, “the player is allowed to embody a fictional hero-version of their self – in other words, an alternate, idealized self” (Pettersen 45). Character creation generally tends to play a very important part in videogames, as a good playable character is the most likely game feature to leave the player with a positive, long-lasting impression of the game (Lankoski 1).

Parallels can be drawn between the secondary world and the Primary World, allowing the audience to relate to the secondary world as well as imagine what it might be like to exist in the world. If the author of a work wishes for the audience to understand and feel for the characters in a secondary world, Wolf argues that “Primary World defaults become important for making connections to the audience's own lived experience and establishing some degree of emotional realism” (Wolf 153). This establishing of emotional realism through the audience's ability to make connections to their own lives is something Tavinor gets further in-depth with in regards to the importance of the characters in videogames. The character being played, which Tavinor refers to as the player-character, is a key part to many of the worlds in interactive videogames, as the character is often made to

represent the player within the world of the videogame, allowing the player to feel that she or he adopts a certain role in it (Tavinor 70).

*Detroit: Become Human*, as has already been established, is a game that comments a lot on past historical events as well as current ones, which can be seen on how the world itself has been built, but also on how the characters have been shaped. Based on Wolf's arguments, it can be said that the game draws connections between the Primary World of the player and the secondary world of the videogame in hopes of creating a sense of emotional realism that in turn might make it easier for the player to feel for the characters. In games, the possibility of designing one's avatar is an aspect of gameplay which helps the player relate to this avatar, making the interaction with the characters feel more immersive and authentic in the secondary world of the game (Pettersen 47). Tavinor goes into great detail about characters and the options given to the player in regards to choosing the characters' appearances or their movements. He argues that the player bonds with the playable characters especially through the ability to choose both how the character should look but also how they should act. In his book, he mentions *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion* as a good example of the player getting to customize their character, both in regards to the character's appearance in the tutorial, but also in terms of the character's personal history, which will unfold throughout the progression of the game as the player completes quests, achieves abilities and powers, and climbs up in level (Tavinor 70-71). As for *Detroit: Become Human*, it is generally not possible to choose how the playable characters should look, aside from one opportunity in which the player is given three different choices as to Kara's hair color, when she decides to change her appearances when fleeing with Alice. While this type of avatar design is not possible, however, Pettersen argues that the game gives a completely new meaning to designing an avatar, as the player has quite free reigns to design the characters emotionally through the forming of their behavior and actions (47). The freedom that the player has to choose how the characters should speak and act can result in greatly differing characters in the end, as the player molds the characters through every single choice made throughout the entire game.

Different scholars have attempted to split up characters into groups depending on the intricacy of their build in regards to appearance, personality and identity. Aarseth argues that there are three different types of characters: The first he calls bots/robots, which is characters that have no individual identity; the second is shallow characters that have individual names as well as individual appearances, but that have very little personality that can set them apart from other characters; and the third he calls deep characters, which have names, individual appearances and personalities. There are others that have slightly different opinions of how characters should be categorized, however.

E.M. Forster argues that what Aarseth calls deep characters should actually be split into two separate types of characters: flat characters that do not seem to change at all throughout the story, and round characters that change and develop along with the progression of the story (Aarseth 4). Flat characters likewise tend to be rather simple, predictable, and easily describable in one short sentence, whereas Lankoski argues that round characters “are believable even when they surprise the reader. A round character should indeed be capable of surprising the reader” (Lankoski et al. 2). Flat, deep characters are therefore characters with individual names, appearances and personalities, yet these characters do not develop much throughout the story. The round, deep characters, on the other hand, have individual names, appearances and personalities, yet have more of a character arch throughout the story as they continue to develop, sometimes in unexpected ways.

In *Detroit: Become Human*, it can be argued that there is a mix of each of the four character-types, which Aarseth also mentions is perfectly common in videogames. The bots that have no identity could be all the random citizens that the player comes across when moving around the world. A character that could be said to fit into the category of shallow characters could be one of the news anchors, as they have names and individual appearances, but very little personality. As for the deep characters, there are some that can be said to be flat, such as Gavin Reed, the police officer who hates androids, as he has a name and an individual character design, but he does not change at all through the entirety of the game. On the other hand, any of the playable androids and even several of the non-playable characters can be classified as being round characters, as they themselves develop as the storyline progresses, such as Hank overcoming his dislike for androids and becoming somewhat supportive of them, or Connor breaking free from his programming and becoming a deviant after much struggle.

As previously mentioned, the tailored culture of an imaginary world makes it easier for the author to get a certain point across, perhaps political or societal. The culture of the secondary world of *Detroit: Become Human* itself is rather like the culture of the Detroit of the Primary World, dealing with issues of race as well as sky-high unemployment rates. When it comes to characters, just like cultures, they often have origin-stories involving the history of the world, as well as character arcs over the story’s course, and they are often shown during the decisive moments, power struggles, and turning points that determine their path for the future. This often involves the world being threatened by some sort of evil powers, which the main character learns about, joins in fighting, and then plays a significant role in defeating said evil power (Wolf 183). As for *Detroit: Become Human*, the threat that is initially posed is very two-sided, depending on the viewpoint of the player, as the androids are

fighting for their believed rights to be free, while most of the humans are fighting against these androids and how they have been replacing so many living workers' jobs.

I want to propose that fictional narrations elicit three levels of imaginative engagement with characters, distinct types of responses normally conflated under the term 'identification'. Together, these levels of engagement comprise the 'structure of sympathy' (Smith 75).

When the audience watches a movie containing ideological messages, perceptive viewers might notice the film's ways of leading them to identify with the characters of the movie, as well as identifying what these characters are correlated with (Soules 145). When it comes to fictional characters, scholar Murray Smith has described three aspects to the audience's response to and engagement with the characters which provides a nuance to the identification they might feel towards the characters. These three aspects are referred to as recognition, alignment, and allegiance, and all three are important for the audience to construct a character. (Christensen 318). According to David Bordwell, the emotional engagement that the audience usually feels with the characters is usually referred to as "identification", yet Murray Smith argues that this term is misleading, as identifying with a character would mean feeling the same as her or him, yet he argues that we "might pity a grieving widow, but she isn't feeling pity, she's feeling grief". Instead, he refers to it as "allegiance", which he argues is the feeling of sympathy and other emotions in response to the emotional states of the characters (Bordwell).

Jill Nelmes argues that the first thing the audience will do when faced with a character is try to recognize this character, meaning to translate the fictionally constructed character into a person that is credible and seemingly real, although the audience knows that the character is, of course, the product of the screenwriter, director, actor or others (112). This phenomenological recognition is comprised of three stages: First of all, the character must be recognizable as either human or anthropomorph; second of all, the character must be categorizable into belonging to a certain type or class; and third of all, the character must be individualized. These three aspects make it possible for the audience to recognize the character, although this character may develop or become more complex throughout the storyline (Christensen 318). In regards to recognition, it is important to note that the audience's ability to recognize a character is aided greatly if they have prior knowledge and experience of the world (Nelmes 112).

When considering *Detroit: Become Human*, the player might experience a certain amount of Todorovian hesitation when regarding the androids of the game. In the 1970's, Tzvetan Todorov

came up with the term ‘the fantastic’, posing the thesis that this fantastic is the brief hesitation that the audience may feel especially when faced with supernatural aspects of a story (Gregersen 24), the brief hesitation in whether or not to believe what it is that they are reading or seeing (Bolongaro 8). As for *Detroit: Become Human*, there may be a certain Todorovian hesitation when the player is first faced with the androids, as it may take a little convincing to understand just what these androids are, and whether the existence of them is logically possible in the secondary world of the game or not. While there might be an element of hesitation, the androids of the game can rather easily be recognized as being anthropomorph, as they are not technically humans, yet they resemble them to a great extent. It will also not take long for the player to recognize the androids as being of a certain lower class in the society of the secondary world, as they are generally dominated by the upper-class humans, though this is a topic which will be explored further later. It is also important to note that it is quite possible that the recognition is helped by the fact that the playable characters act as the avatar for the player, both meaning that the player might be quick to identify with the playable characters yet also meaning that it can be even harder for the player to separate the android aspect from the human aspect, given that they resemble humans as much as they do as well as that they are played by a human with human thoughts and emotions. Both the playable and non-playable androids are likewise also relatively easy to individualize, as even though many of the androids look the same due to them being of the same model, every deviant android creates its own name and develops its own personality rather quickly after deviating from their programming, therefore making them easy to tell apart from each other. Another aspect that makes the characters easily recognizable is, as Nelmes mentioned, the prior experience and knowledge of the world, which is true for *Detroit: Become Human*, as the immense amount of worldbuilding occurring in the game also makes much it easier for the audience to go through the process of recognition in regards to the characters in the game.

After the initial recognition, the second thing that will happen is that the audience will become aligned with a particular character, which means that the audience will see as well as feel the story through this character (Nelmes 112). The audience will through this alignment gain access to the characters actions as well as into its mind and emotions through the narrative mechanisms of a work (Christensen 318). With the alignment comes the third aspect; allegiance, which revolves around the audience’s moral judgments of the character, making it dependent on the aspect of alignment as it “depends on the spectator having what she takes to be reliable access to the character’s state of mind, on understanding the context of a character’s actions, and having morally evaluated the character on the basis of this knowledge” (Christensen 318). Alignment therefore simply places the audience in

relation to a character whereas allegiance depends on the audience digging deeper into the character's mind, evaluating its morals and ideologies, and likewise morally aligning oneself with, or taking the side of, a character, and rooting for said character (Soules 145) against the villains or particular struggles that the character faces. Nelmes believes that classical film theory would consider alignment with a character to be involuntary, arguing that if the audience is faced with the point of view as well as the subjectivity of a character, it is almost impossible not to form a close bond with the character, therefore creating this alignment with them, which then leads to a feeling of allegiance (112).

While Nelmes argues that not forming a close bond with the character of a film is near impossible, this might apply even more for videogames, as the difference between films and videogames is that the audience merely follows a character whereas a player will play through the storyline *as* the avatar. Playing as a character, as mentioned earlier, makes it much more likely for the player to be faced with the character's emotions and thoughts, resulting in it being likely for the player to bond with said character easily, which would imply that recognition, alignment and allegiance might come to the player easier than it might the viewer of a film. The recognition of the characters comes with the introductions of them, as the player is thrust right into the action of playing as them and learning about them through cutscenes. The moral alignment is bound to follow rather shortly after, as the player learns more about the characters' traits, thoughts and emotions, leaving them to feel for the characters, eventually leading to the allegiance towards said characters. In regards to the audience's allegiance to the playable characters in *Detroit: Become Human*, it can be argued that the moral or ideological allegiance can be affected greatly by the vast amount of different dialogue options and choices that the player can make. The player has a great influence on how the characters should act and react throughout the game, which might bring the player to feel even closer to, more aligned with, and more in allegiance to the character.

Petri Lankoski et al. argue that the nature of the character is affected by the player's actions, yet that there are many ways to control and guide the actions of the player and, through that, the character's nature. Through the setting of goals, scripting of predefined actions, as well as deciding on which actions to implement, the player's freedom can be restricted, which, when combined with the characterization of a character, results in the interpretation of said character being affected (1). In regards to the player's freedom, Tavinor likewise mentions the effects of the possibility of moving and choosing freely, being able to travel wherever one wants, or make conscious (or unconscious) choices that affect how the narrative branches out (Tavinor 71). While *Detroit: Become Human* does not give the player much of a chance to move around freely, often being stopped by the boundaries

set by the androids' own programming, the player is provided with a big, branching narrative that extends quite far, and can result in greatly differing endings to the game. The player gets to make decisions at nearly every turn. Most of these choices make it hard to anticipate the outcome that is to follow, so the player must follow their gut feeling in regards to whether to say one thing or the other, or to strike back or remain passive, depending on what they feel is the right approach.

The game generally tends to insinuate that it is always best to play through the game being as peaceful as possible, as the most peaceful approach is usually the one that results in most characters being alive at the end of the game. However, this may not always be the wisest choice, which can be seen in the scene where Carl's son, Leo has shown up, clearly high on Red Ice. When Leo begins to push Markus around, Carl tells Markus to remain unresponsive. If the player obeys Carl's orders, which they might be keen to do as Carl is a kind character, Carl will suffer a heart attack, and Leo will blame Markus for the man's death. However, if Markus disobeys his orders and strikes back, Carl will live. The police will show up no matter what, and Markus' fate itself will not change, but a life will actually be saved, even though the player actually chooses the option that may seem the most violent.

Given that the player is constantly facing important choices, it is almost impossible to avoid forming a connection with the player-characters, as the player will want for as many characters to survive as possible. Likewise, the player will be forming an opinion of the humans of Detroit, and will be faced with options throughout Markus' storyline especially in which it is possible to go down the peaceful route or the combative route. Depending on which route the player chooses to take, the outcome for all the characters, playable and non-playable alike, will differ greatly. Given that the player spends so many hours attempting to help free all the androids of Detroit, and bonding with Connor, Kara and Markus during this whole time, the player will undoubtedly feel for the characters and grieve over those that are lost along the way. In this sense, *Detroit: Become Human* does a great job at building characters that the player can relate to and play as, as if these characters represented the player within the world of the game, which Tavinor likewise mentions the importance of, as due to the interactivity of games, "The relationship between the player and their character does seem to be one of *identity*", the character being the player's "*fictional proxy*" in the secondary world of the game (Tavinor 70).

## ○ Segregation, slavery, and racial hierarchy

An author that has focused a lot on how history might be shown through both science fiction and worldbuilding is Leah Zaidi. Zaidi quotes Thomas Lombardo's idea of what good science fiction presents, which is "a fully realized, multidimensional vision, including not only the technological and scientific, but the psychological, cultural, moral, social, and environmental dimensions of future human existence." (Zaidi 16). Rather than being just stories, she thereby argues that science fiction works entails technology and science as well as a certain focus on the cultures, morals, environment, psychology and social aspects of human existence.

In her article, Zaidi mentions that researchers have found that "narratives that appeal to 'protected values', including core personal, national, or religious values, may be particularly effective at influencing receivers", as well as that "Protected values resist compromise and are tied with identity, affective value, moral decision-making, and other aspects of social cognition" (Zaidi 15). A videogame such as *Detroit: Become Human*, given that it focuses so greatly on the differences between androids and human, as well as how society treats androids, is a good example of a science fiction work which appeals to the player's protected values.



The android compartment at the back of the bus, separating them from the humans (*Detroit: Become Human*).

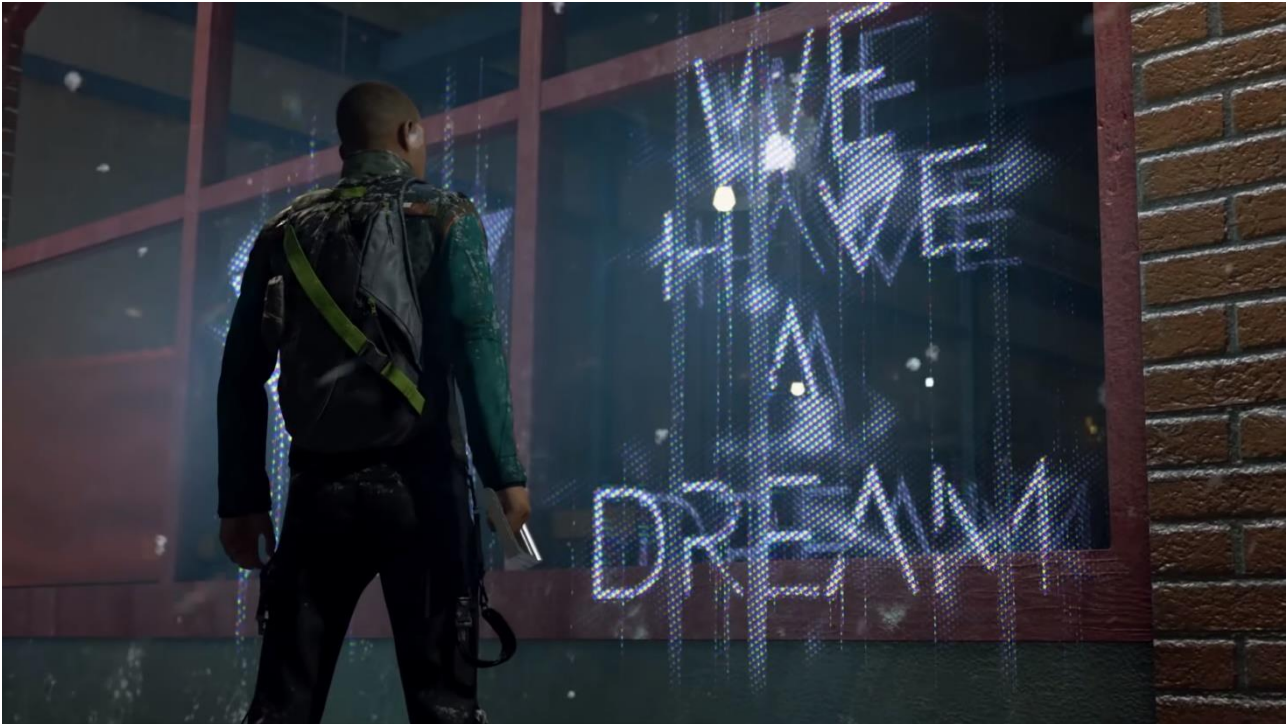
Although the game portrays several different societal issues such as domestic abuse, drug abuse, and police brutality, one of the biggest topics in *Detroit: Become Human* is that of black history. Topics such as slavery and segregation are littered throughout the entirety of the game, and can be seen in all aspects of it such as in the world, its characters, its paratexts and also in occurring events. And as for the characters, black history can be argued as being portrayed through both the androids and the humans in the game.

As for the playable characters, the character Markus is depicted as a male person of color. At the beginning of his journey, the player sees him in the home of his kind owner, Carl Manfred, who is seen treating his android with as much kindness as one would any close, human friend or relative. Around the same time, however, the player will also see how the general society treats him, both through his interactions with the protestors early in the game, or when meeting Carl's son, Leo, who looks down upon the android and eventually actually attacks him out of pure frustration over the fact that his father seems to care so much for what he calls a "plastic toy" and a "machine". Through all of these interactions, the player is quickly faced with this appeal to their protected values as they are made aware of the societal issues within the secondary world of the game. Throughout the entirety of the game, the player follows Markus' storyline from owned android to the leader of a rebellion, and the player is the one who has to make the conscious decision of whether Markus should take the peaceful path, trying to educate the humans of their wrongdoings towards androids through peaceful protests, or if he should start a war with the humans, getting revenge for all the years of mistreatment of androids, wanting to beat the humans into submission.

Despite the many humans that have clear issues with androids, there are some human characters that are supportive of android freedom, such as Rose Chapman. The player comes across Rose when Kara, Alice and Luther arrive at her house searching for help to cross the border. Being a black woman helping androids across the border, it can be argued that she shares many similarities with the abolitionist Harriet Tubman, who helped smuggle minorities across the border in the 1800's. When Kara and the others have arrived at Rose's house, the player might choose for Kara to ask why Rose is helping them. To this, Rose will answer that "My people were often made to feel their lives were worthless... Some survived but only because they found others who helped them along the way..." (*Detroit: Become Human*).

Another character who is supportive of the androids from the beginning is Markus' owner, Carl Manfred. The player experiences just how much Carl cares for his android throughout the game, almost seeming to care for the android as if he was his son. When realizing that some protestors have scuffed up Markus, he calls them idiots, wondering if they think that they can stop progress by beating up a few androids, as well as caringly telling Markus that he hopes the protestors did not harm him. On several occasions, he even attempts to help Markus think for himself rather than simply follow orders, asking him to find something to do whilst Carl finishes his breakfast, or asking him to paint something of his own choosing. Carl likewise imposes wise words on Markus on several occasions throughout the game, such as telling him that "This world doesn't like those who are different, Markus. Don't let anyone tell you who you should be." (Detroit: Become Human), showing himself to be a kind, caring person who does not discriminate based on race, and who dislikes the general world views on androids.

Whereas our Primary World has a long history of racial hierarchy where whites have dominated all other races, *Detroit: Become Human* shows this hierarchy slightly differently. There is not a single comment on race in regards to skin color, though there is, of course, not much focus on this type of racial difference, as most of the human characters are white. However, the game seems to attempt to tackle racial hierarchy through the issue of humans versus androids. On Connor's first mission, the player is faced with a deviant android, Daniel, who has killed one of his owners and then taken the daughter hostage. When investigating the scene, several clues point to the fact that Daniel was being replaced, causing him to lash out. When trying to convince the android to hand himself over, Connor might attempt to calm Daniel by saying: "these emotions you are feeling are just errors in your software". Daniel will then answer: "No... it's not my fault... I never wanted this. I loved them, you know, but I was nothing to them. Just a slave to be ordered around" (Detroit: Become Human). Already from the beginning of the game, the player is faced with robots capable of human emotions such as love, fear and sadness, seeing Daniel crying as he threatens the little girl he once was a friend to, yet they are also faced with the term "slave" in relation to these machines. When protesting, the game also gives the player the option to choose for Markus to use "WE HAVE A DREAM" as the slogan for the protest, clearly referencing Martin Luther King Jr.



Markus tagging a window during the first stage of their protest (Detroit: Become Human).

To back this belief that androids are a tool for showing racial inequality is Keith Piper's arguments on the portrayal of people of color in science fiction. He argues that there can often be a form of metaphorical relationship between robots in science fiction works and the subject of black people in fiction, pointing out that they are "imagined in certain discourses to act according to type". He likewise mentions that they are both categorized as being "other", being assigned particular roles within the world's cultural and economic order, as well as being situated either in the role of a compliant servant or the role of a non-compliant monster (Piper 97). These roles of compliant servants or non-compliant monster are roles that are seen frequently from the androids throughout the game.

Slave labor was the characteristic form of labor in ancient society and the economic foundation of the classical Greek and Roman cultures. Long after it had vanished from the centers of European society it was reborn in the New World at the dawn of capitalist civilization and continued to flourish in the bosom of the capitalist system for three centuries and a half (Novack 15).

As seen in the quote above, the enslavement of others is something that has been occurring since ancient times up until the New World, seeming to never die out due to the emergence of the capitalist system. One author who has written a substantial amount of text on the use and abuse of slaves is Karl Marx, who, through many years, has commented on the use of non-paid workers both

in ancient times as well as the New World. While his works focus a great deal on the financial aspect to the use of slaves as well as the development of countries as a result of slavery through several centuries, some of his thoughts on slavery might be important to bring to light when attempting to analyze the topic of slavery in *Detroit: Become Human*.

According to “In Defence of Marxism”, a website described as “one of the world’s foremost sources of Marxist theory, analysis on current events and the history of the revolutionary workers’ movement” (In Defence of Marxism), the abolishment of slavery did not come about due to slavery being immoral. Instead, slavery was abolished due to the fact that it was no longer profitable to keep slaves (Holroyd). Marx argued that “Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry”, saying that slavery is what gave value to the colonies, giving the colonies the possibility to create world trade, the “pre-condition of large-scale industry”. He argues that slavery is an incredibly important economic category which has always been around among the institutions of the peoples, though modern nations may have been able to keep slavery disguised (Lawrence 1). In relation to *Detroit: Become Human*, Marx’s belief that slavery is an economically important part of society can be argued to be true for the secondary world of the game. The androids seem to have become an integral part of society in the city of Detroit, as they continue to replace more and more human job positions. They are used everywhere from the military (where, when considering society’s general view on androids, risking the “lives” of the androids would undoubtedly be more preferable in comparison to risking the lives of actual living, breathing people) to the households of citizens of all social classes from all over the city. Marx argued that if slavery suddenly disappeared, America would be completely wiped off the map of nations (Lawrence 1), which could be said to apply to America, and Detroit especially, in the game, as a sudden disappearance of all androids would most likely cause the economy to collapse completely, as the people and the government alike are so dependent on the work done by the androids.

Like all other exploitative social systems, Marx viewed modern slavery as a system with a dynamic rise as productive forces developed, followed by stagnation, decline and overthrow. Most importantly, it was a society which created the seeds of its own destruction (Lawrence 1).

The quote above, stating that slavery in the modern world has a certain path it follows; rising in popularity, standing still, declining, and then being overthrown, is proven to (at least for the secondary world of the game) be true through the storyline of the game. In the beginning of the story,

it seems as if there has been a dynamic rise as the productive forces of the androids have been developed, yet it quickly becomes apparent that America has reached the point of stagnation. All three playable androids are still working as free labor for their owners; whether they be an angry, working-class man; an old, kind one; or the government, and only a few androids seem to have begun deviating and rebelling against their masters, breaking free of their slavery. These few androids breaking free from their programming, and thereby their enslavement, however, implies that the slavery system is quickly moving into a decline. As the story progresses, even the playable characters begin to break free along with increasingly many non-playable androids, eventually getting to the point where the androids can overthrow the government, the CyberLife corporation, and the android owners. Marx points out that there is a unity amongst the free, paid workers and the slaves, as they are united through class interest. He likewise argues that there is strength in numbers, and only by gathering a large amount of support from the paid workers can slavery be defeated, calling the working class “the true political power of the North” (Lawrence 14-15), meaning that they are a powerful force to be reckoned with if they choose to stand up against the power of the government. The public’s views on slavery is therefore an important factor in Marx’ opinion, as the support from free, paid workers is pivotal to the overthrowing of slavery.



The public opinion improving every time the player chooses the peaceful approach (Detroit: Become Human).

The public's general response to the mistreatment of the androids will differ greatly depending on how the player plays the game. The more peaceful options a player opts for when steering Markus through speeches, android liberations and protests, the more the public's opinion of the androids will improve. If the public is positive towards the androids, the player might come across a news broadcast in which horrified people from the street are being interviewed after the big protest staged by Markus. One person says that "They're conducting raids across the city! Androids were hanged all along Woodward Avenue" (*Detroit: Become Human*), which for most players will bring back memories from history lessons on black history, where at one point in time, the lynching of people of color seemed a common occurrence.

According to Ashraf Rushdy, the first lynching occurred in 1780 during the Revolutionary War, where an "insurgent" Tory was hung without trial by Colonel Charles Lynch along with the entire Bedford County militia, and slowly but surely since then, lynching began becoming more accepted as a method of punishing criminals around the American frontier especially. Eventually, however, lynching began being a method not only to punish criminals, but also to be "a weapon of terrorism used to control the mobility of particular groups of people" based on their race, ethnicity or class (3-8). The mention of lynching does not only occur once during the game, however. When escaping the raid on Jericho and attempting to cross the border with Kara and Alice, the observant player might also spot the feet of two androids hanging inside a store, which Kara will attempt to shield Alice from if the player investigates the shop window.

Rushdy argues that "the lynching of African Americans occupies a unique intellectual space in the American imagination because lynchers and their apologists created a mythic apparatus to justify it (chivalry) while hiding its more easily discernible motives (white supremacy and social control over a formerly enslaved labor pool)" (xi). Once again, through the worldbuilding as well as the story, Cage seems to have portrayed his own take on the historical era of lynching in *Detroit: Become Human*. The lynching going on in the game is not happening based on androids breaking laws and hurting others, but is instead happening based on social control through another kind of race supremacy; that of a human race supremacy. Cage can therefore be said to be attempting to portray the wrongness of these types of attacks on ethnicity, race and societal position through showing how both humans as well as androids seem horrified and appalled by the lynchings happening all over the city.

The president of the United States, President Warren, is seen several times throughout the game, giving speeches on the android situation and how the country will be dealing with the issue. After the large protest, despite this being a peaceful one, the president will speak on national television, saying that androids are a threat to national security and therefore needing to be exterminated. Not long after, the player will see a sequence in which the president is speaking to the nation at a press conference. She declares a national curfew, suspends the right to assembly, imposes restrictions on all electronic communication, and declares that all androids must be handed over to the authorities where they will be destroyed in the temporary camps set up in all their major cities. This will, as mentioned, most likely seem to the viewer to be a reference to the concentration camps of World War II, in which Jews would be sent to their deaths in gas chambers. This reference might be reinstated further after the president finishes her speech, as the player is then given several dialogue options, acting as the reporters asking the president questions. One possible question that the player might come across sounds: "Some say these camps awaken painful memories from human history. How do you respond to that?" To this, she replies: "That's absurd. There's absolutely no connection. Androids are not living beings. All we are doing is destroying defective machines." (Detroit: Become Human), denying any connection to Hitler's concentration camps. This statement may seem rather hollow to most players, however. If they had not already been considering the likeness between the android camps of the secondary world of the game and the concentration camps of the Primary World of the audience, the thought has certainly been planted by the creator now, portraying the wrongness of the situation by making a connection to such a widely known historical context, which occurrence would today be frowned upon by most.



The android uniform worn by the AX400 model (Detroit: Become Human).

Along with the android destruction camps, the issue of Nazism and the treatment of Jews can also be argued to be portrayed through the uniforms that the androids wear. According to the *Detroit: Become Human* fandom wiki, the U.S. government passed a legislation called the “American Androids Act” in the year 2029, 9 years prior to the events unfolding in the game, in order to regulate android technology (American Androids Act). The creation of the American Android Act required all androids to be clearly identifiable as being androids when in public, requiring them to be visually distinguished from humans. This identification includes wearing a neon blue armband on their right upper arm, neon blue triangle on both the front and the back of their uniform, their model number on their uniform, and bearing an LED on their right temple (American Androids Act). Throughout the history of our Primary World, this type of identification has been seen many times before, though given the links to the concentration camps of the Nazi regime, it is most probable that Cage may have had the badges carried by Jews during World War II in mind when creating the American Android Act and the uniforms worn by the androids. Jews were forced by law to wear a blue or yellow Star of David on a band around their arms when moving around in public in Germany in order to indicate their heritage during the war, though in the concentration camps, aside from being branded with an inmate number, they were forced to wear different kinds of stars, triangles and other markings in order to identify them by their arrest category, race, and nationality (Stars, Triangles, and Markings). These types of markings resemble those seen on the androids’ uniforms in the game, as they are easily

identifiable as being of the “lesser” species, sometimes causing the androids to suffer through harsh words and even violence from non-playable characters in the game when noticed, which the players might experience themselves as Markus early on in the game is faced with the humans protesting against androids.

The androids being treated horribly by humans, being enslaved, suffering through segregation and dealing with unfair imprisonment based on their species, while clearly referencing previous peoples’ struggles through history and perhaps being a metaphor for the people of color who have been mistreated in the past, and are still mistreated today, might also hold meaning in regards to the human versus machine debate. It could be argued that the creator of the game wishes to convey a message about machines not being all bad, perhaps attempting to convey a message that humans should not make the same mistake twice, enslaving those that are different from the white population, if we are indeed headed to a time period of such technological advancements as seen in the game. Or perhaps the references are simply just that: references to historical events that have already passed, simply recreated in an updated, more entertaining version through a science fiction videogame, drawing on historical references in order to engage the viewer but not necessarily teach them any valuable lessons. It could, however, also be that the androids are used as a metaphor for the types of ethical repression seen both in the history of our Primary World, yet also in the current society of the Primary World of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, sending a warning to the player to treat others justly and without regard to their race, whether it be a person of color or an android.

## Social and Societal Status

Throughout the game, the world of *Detroit: Become Human* portrays a big difference in social classes between the different non-playable human characters. Markus lives with the old, wealthy artist, Carl, who lives in a big, well-kept house. Carl enjoys a full breakfast, has a glass of fine alcohol once in a while, goes to fancy parties, encourages Markus to play chess and the piano, and spends his days painting, clearly belonging to the upper class. Kara’s owner, Todd, on the other hand, is clearly situated in the working class, eating more basic meals, doing drugs, living in a messy house, and drinking what seems to be several cans of beer per day, judging by the state of the house. When Todd nears his house with Kara, the music turns rather somber. The house in which Todd lives, as well as the houses surrounded it, is clearly quite run-down, and all around the neighborhood it seems that construction work is going on, a sign saying “REBUILD NORTH CORKTOWN” showing an attempt to bring more life to the run-down part of town. The inside of Todd’s house looks as bad as

the outside, generally run-down and also littered with garbage, take-away, and beer bottles. As Kara is cleaning Todd's house, the player also sees several denied applications for credit cards as well as several overdrawn account notices on the table next to the door. There are even more of these on his dresser in his bedroom, showing just how much financial trouble the man is in, also possibly showing how many of the citizens of Detroit both in the secondary world of the game but also the Primary World of the audience may be suffering through the exact same financial issues.

Carl treats his android with respect and care, having formed a strong bond with him, whereas Todd mistreats his androids, seemingly having beaten Kara so hard on occasion that he has had to take her in for repairs, which is evident when the player is first introduced to Kara. Todd comes in to pick her up from repairs, where he has a short discussion with an employee on what happened to her.

Worker: "It was a bit hard to get her back in working order. It was really messed up... What did you say happened to it again?"

Todd: "Huh, A car hit it... Stupid accident..."

Worker: "I see..."

It would therefore seem that the upper-class Carl is a good, honest man who treats others well, whereas working-class Todd is an angry, abusive, alcoholic drug addict who mistreats those around him, only getting a possible chance at redemption in the end of the game, possibly allowing Kara to take Alice with her when the player might happen upon him at the bus station. The game could therefore be said to be portraying the working class as being more prone to cases of domestic abuse, perhaps showing that there might be a link between social class and domestic abuse in America. In an article in *Social Service Review*, Roger Petersen argues that there are two main explanations for domestic abuse in contemporary America, one being the sexist traditions and structures of today's society and the other being the stress of social structures and violent behavior learned through the family line. He describes that while the first explanation would speculate that abuse based on these reasons will generally occur randomly throughout society. The second explanation, however, would speculate that abuse stemming from these reasons would be concentrated primarily among the working class (Petersen 390-391). It is certainly a possibility, then, that the author of the game decided to make the working-class Todd an abusive man rather than a man such as the upper-class Carl, showing the social context to the Primary World in regards to the social classification of domestic abuse.

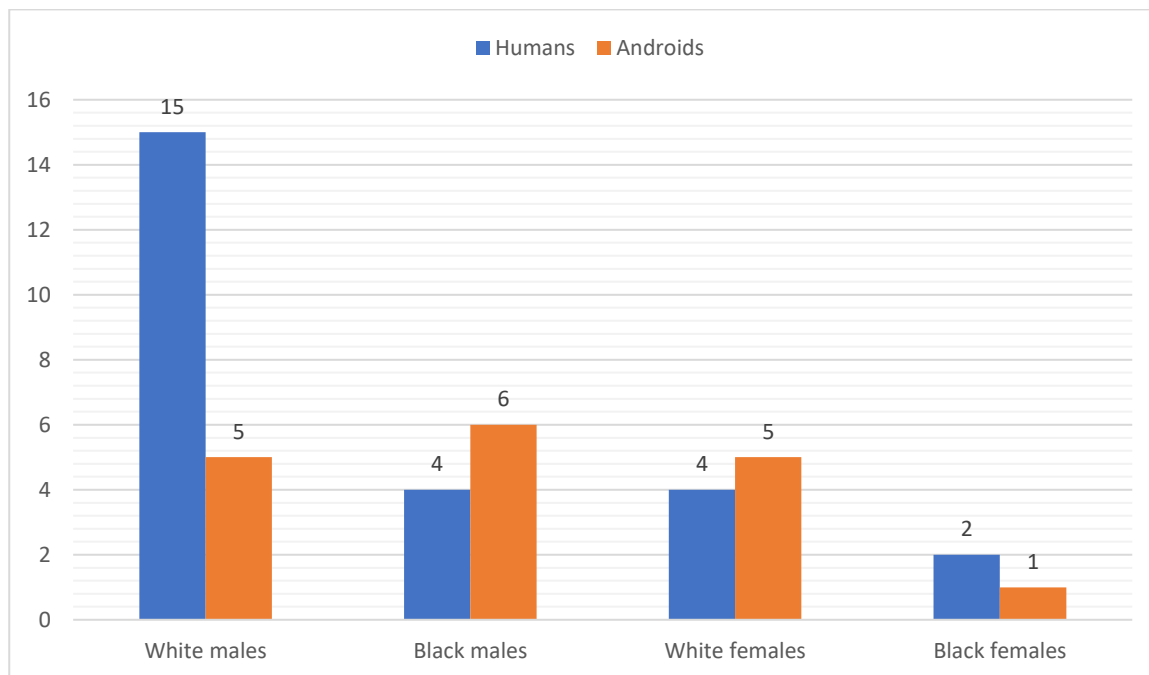
Aside from the more typical upper/lower social class differences and inequalities, it can be argued that there is another type of separation in class in the game, which is the clear separation seen between androids and humans. Although it is clear to see a certain difference in class between characters such as the working-class Todd and the upper-class Carl, the real separation in class can be seen in the obvious differences between the working-class androids and the upper-class humans. There is the obvious case of the humans owning the androids, which automatically put the androids at a lower status than that of their human owners. The androids are, in most cases, treated as lowly workers, generally only spoken to when the owner of the androids deem it necessary, usually only to give them a new command to follow. This degrading type of treatment is seen throughout the game through Todd's treatment of Kara and Alice as well as through Connor's investigations of the often-mistreated androids that have turned deviant and proceeded to harm their owners. Another clear example of how the class separation is seen between humans and androids is that the androids are technically just the property of the humans, slaves to the whims of their masters. And if the androids choose to disobey their masters, they are considered faulty, and the humans can then simply choose to have the androids destroyed just as they would any other faulty electronic device or household item. So while there is a clear difference between the social classes of the human characters, it is also possible to separate these classes into the upper human class and the lower android class, as the androids can be said to be of a considerably lower social class than that of any of the humans, no matter how poor these humans may be.

## Gender and sexual representation

In *Detroit: Become Human*, while the playable androids differ from each other in both gender and race, the non-playable humans with somewhat prominent roles in the game are predominantly white males (Pettersen 50). Lieutenant Hank Anderson, Kara's owner Todd, Markus' owner Carl, agent Perkins, detective Gavin Reed, Elijah Kamski, as well as many others are white males who, with Carl being one of the only true exceptions, have more or less harsh, standoffish personalities. There is only one important black woman, Rose, who is kind, caring and helpful towards Kara and the others as they try to get to Canada. Detroit in the Primary World today is, as previously stated, rather segregated, but also holds a very large population of people of color, which therefore makes it interesting to see the abundance of white, non-playable male characters in the game. It is curious whether it is a case of simply not hitting the nail on the head in regards to portraying the reality of Primary World Detroit, or if they might have had a certain idea behind creating so many white characters, perhaps wanting to show the world for what it might sometimes be seen as. Or perhaps it

is a case of whether or not this is something the game developers have even considered, or whether it is simply a product of their own history, culture and society.

At first glance, the player might experience a great overload of white males in the game, especially in regards to the humans of the game, while the androids seem to be a bit more evenly distributed in both gender and race. However, in order to fully support this initial belief, it is helpful to look into the exact number of characters the game contains and how these characters are distributed into race and gender. As there are many non-playable characters, however, many that are unnamed that the player might only see fleetingly one time in the entire playthrough, the amount of characters being explored will need to be adjusted somewhat. Therefore, the characters explored here are divided into two groups: all human characters that have been credited with a name, such as Hank Anderson or Police Officer #0617; and likewise also all android characters that have been credited with a name, though seeing as some android characters are the same due to them being the same model, such as Simon and Daniel, these “duplicates” are not taken into account.



The above graph shows the spread of human and android characters in regards to their race and gender. It is clear to see that there is an abundance of named white males in the game in comparison to black males, white females, and black females. Yet it is interesting to see that the representation seen in the named androids is much more evenly spaced out. Though there are still not many black female androids, there are six black male androids to the five white males and five white females.

While there might seem to be an abundance of white males throughout most of the game, *Detroit: Become Human* does seem to attempt to take a more neutral stance in regards to gender equality in regards to the androids in the workforces (Pettersen 52). Whereas in the Primary World there are inarguably some job positions that tend to draw in a certain gender, this does not appear to be an issue in the secondary world of the game, as androids of all genders generally seem to be occupying different jobs with no regards to the typical gendering of the professions. A clear example of this would be the sex industry in the game. The player will during a mission follow Connor and Hank as they go to a strip club named “The Eden Club” in order to investigate a murder. When Connor and Hank walk through the doors to the club, several male and female androids are lined up in tubes at each side of the room, all barely wearing any clothes. In the next room, three stripper poles are placed on a line in the middle of the room, an android dancing around each of the poles, two of them being female and one male.

In *Detroit: Become Human*, there is not much to experience in regards to relationships and sexuality. There is a possibility for a relationship to grow between Markus and North, though this is seemingly the only full-on relationship seen between a male and a female character in the game. However, there is also a slight focus on the LGBT community in the form of a short introduction to a relationship between two females. As the mission at the strip club progresses, it becomes apparent to the player that the deviant android that murdered her customer did so in order to be able to escape with her love: another female android. The murderer will tell Connor: “I didn’t mean to kill him... I just wanted to stay alive... get back to the one I love.” At this point, the two androids grab each other’s hands and look into each other’s eyes. The android then continues: “I wanted her to hold me in her arms again... make me forget about the humans... their smell of sweat and their dirty words...” (*Detroit: Become Human*). Later on, in the game, Hank will mention the two androids again, sounding very understanding when he says that they seemed to just want to be together, seeming to really be in love with each other. So, while there is not much focus on sexuality at all, there is a bit of LGBT representation, showing that androids, and seemingly also humans when considering the opinion of the otherwise rather harsh-seeming Hank, are open in regards to homosexual relationships. The game developers could certainly be said to be sending a certain signal that the people of the LGBT community should be respected, as love is love, no matter the gender.

## Character development

Throughout the game there is a great deal of character development to be seen in all three playable characters. Every playable character can through their character arcs go from being obedient androids to being deviants capable of feeling emotions usually thought to be solely human. Kara might end up developing a strong motherly, very protective bond towards Alice. Markus becomes the leader of a revolution, developing a strong sense of what is just and right as he fights to free his people. Connor might develop empathy for those deviants that he is supposed to hunt, and develop a sense of friendship with his partner, Hank.

Character development is not only limited to the playable characters, however, as some of the non-playable characters can also be seen to develop a substantial amount depending on the way the player plays the game. A character such as Connor's partner, Lieutenant Hank Anderson, starts off as being an angry man with an alcohol problem, who obviously hates androids, saying as much time and time again both to Connor and to those he works with. He is heard calling Connor a "plastic prick", and even has anti-android slogans on his desk, such as "WE DON'T BLEED THE SAME COLOR", "Use your brain, not your android", and "NO MORE ANDROID". However, if the player plays Connor as being a compassionate character, not stepping on Hank's toes, the two of them will eventually become friends. After Markus' initial protest, Connor and Hank are taken off the case of solving the deviant android issue, to which Connor will tell Hank that he will be deactivated and analyzed to find out why he failed. If the relationship between Connor and Hank is good enough, Hank will say: "What if we're on the wrong side, Connor? What if we're fighting against people who just wanna be free?..", showing a completely newly developed side to him, which has come about possibly because of both Markus' peaceful protesting as well as Connor's behavior towards Hank.

The player makes the choice whether to have a peaceful or an aggressive approach, and can often figure out which responses will impact a relationship with a non-playable character positively or negatively. In this sense, it is very much up to the player herself to decide which direction the character development should go, having a big influence on the overall character arcs.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to identify how the universe of *Detroit: Become Human* showed the cultural and historical context of the game, as well as how videogame analysis could methodologically be merged with a culturally oriented analysis such as New Historicism.

*Detroit: Become Human*, being a game heavily influenced by the science fiction genre, can be said to comment on many socio-cultural aspects of our Primary World, as is generally common for the genre. The game borrows heavily from existing cultural and social issues, which, while common in the science fiction genre, can also be argued to be an increasingly commonly used tool in the aspect of worldbuilding in videogames. There are many different socio-cultural contexts related to the real world of the player which are touched upon throughout the entirety of the game, through both the playable and non-playable characters as well as the many aspects of the worldbuilding in the game.

The way Detroit is portrayed in the game is, though a science fiction-like, futuristic take on it, rather resembling of the Detroit of the Primary World, which is apparent when looking at the mise-en-scène of the game. The lighting, costumes, setting, and overall composition show clear signs of being inspired by a real-world Detroit struggling to improve itself. Primary World Detroit, while still not having fully recovered, is, according to some scholars such as Boggs and Kurashige, attempting to recover through the creation of many different projects, which can be seen in the differences between the more highly technological parts of downtown Detroit and the more rural, run-down part of the city which Kara's owner, Todd, lives in. In comparison to Detroit, which seems to be both a city in rapid "improvement" yet also a prison to the androids, Canada is portrayed as the land of the free. This may be due to its way of recovering from the deindustrialization, which it managed significantly better than Detroit. This deindustrialization, as well as the rise in drug use, violence and crime, and the great racial inequality evident through the history of Detroit, have made a deep impact on the creation of the world of *Detroit: Become Human*, which is clear to see in the focus on drug abuse as well as the aspects of social class.

Through the portrayal of the highly technological city of Detroit as well as the existence of the very human-like, technologically superior androids, it is clear to see that Cage was inspired by transhumanist philosophy as well as Kurzweil's idea that artificial entities will outpace human abilities due to the exponentially growing computer programming speed. Given that the videogame is set in the year 2038, only 20 years post the release of the game, it must be believed that this choice

was made due to the belief that technology will continue to improve rapidly, and much quicker than that of the human race.

The imagined culture of the game allows Cage to create his own original culture, yet it also provides him with the option to borrow from the culture of the Primary World as much as he wishes in order to drive home his message and philosophies, merging historical events with theories of the future and a sprinkling of science fiction. One of the most prominent socio-cultural contexts that can be seen in the portrayal of the “other”, which in the Primary World Detroit would be people of color, though their struggles are portrayed through the struggles of the arguably enslaved androids. The playable characters, Connor, Kara and Markus, as well as the many non-playable androids are representative of the general “other”, representing an array of peoples that have been suppressed throughout the years, seen through uniform markings such as those worn by the Jews in concentration camps and the slavery of people of color. As the playable characters act as the player’s avatar, the player getting to play through the storyline of each character in their fight for freedom, the aspect of Murray Smith’s theory of character engagement comes into play, as the player cannot avoid but to feel for the characters she or he is playing as.

Throughout the game, the player experiences topics such as social class difference as well as racial issues. The game does not appear to address racial issues in regards to the human characters, as it consists of an abundance of white, male humans, though any female or colored character is treated just as fairly as the white males. The real racial issues seem to be diverted towards the distinction between androids and humans, as the androids are portrayed in such a way that they come off as being the equivalent to a person of color, being of a different, lowlier race than the humans. The same goes for the aspect of social class, which is not portrayed much between the individual humans, aside from the extremes such as Kara’s owner, Todd, and Markus’ owner, Carl. However, this class difference is once again seen between the upper-class humans and the working-class androids, once again proving the fact that the androids are representational of the “other” of the Primary World.

This thesis has proven that through the combination of videogame analysis and the more culturally focused New Historicist analysis, it is methodologically possible to reach a much more in-depth analysis of certain topics such as the worldbuilding of a videogame such as *Detroit: Become Human* and the socio-cultural contexts and parallels that can be drawn to the Primary World of the player.

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