DYSTOPIA AND BINARY BONDAGE IN *DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN*

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Abstract: In the twenty-first century, one of the most ubiquitous topics is the rise of artificial intelligence and the involvement of digital machinery in everyday life. It is proven that incorporating AI into human life has benefited human activities; yet, it is evident that this engagement has allowed humans to be replaced by technologies. This involuntarily gives rise to Anthropocene anxiety that reinforces anthropocentric ideals over technocratic progress. The game *Detroit: Become Human* (2018) further portrays this feeling of anthropocentric anxiety. Developed by Quantic Dream, *Detroit: Become Human* is a narrative-driven video game that allows the player to experience a bleak dystopian future where androids, or humanoids, equipped with an extended form of artificial intelligence, have advanced to the point of being indistinguishable from humans but are considered a commodity. This paper is going to analyse *Detroit: Become Human* to highlight the intricacies within the game that depicts a world riddled with institutional injustice, societal deterioration, and technical omnipotence, resulting in a dystopia. The narrative exposes how the humanoids develop their own intelligence and sense of being, allowing them to retaliate against their subjugation and revolt for their fundamental rights and autonomy. By integrating theoretical frameworks of posthumanism, this paper will attempt to explore the pervasive hegemonic influence within the city as well as the nature of influence that has created a culture of fear, submission, and "othering" for the humanoids, who are sentient but inferior. This paper will look deeply into the technological rebellion depicted within the narrative to examine how the humanoids struggle to claim their individual identity while challenging the established order of the humans. In this way, the paper will shed light on the quest for emancipation and how it blurs the demarcation between man and machine, pointing towards a future where humanity confronts its obsolescence.

Keywords: *Posthumanism, Dystopia, Othering, Identity, Cyborg*

Introduction

Although there are several works before the twentieth century where elements of dystopia can be found in fiction, the rise of dystopian fiction is primarily marked by the twentieth century with the rise of modernism and later postmodernism. Dystopian fiction primarily explores an oppressive and controlled society that is under the guise of being a utopia. In

that way, dystopian fiction has granted the ruminations from "the socio-political sub-genre of science fiction" with a human face (qtd. in Rosenfeld 4). From George Orwell's *1984* (1949), depicting totalitarian control over the world through propaganda and surveillance, to Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* (1950), depicting a world taken over by technological control, dystopian fiction has presented a critique of the contemporary social order. This very notion of dystopia is further extended to films such as George Miller's *Mad Max* franchise (1979, 1981, 1985, 2015, 2024) and the *Blade Runner* series (1982, 2017), both depicting a bleak future and challenging the notion of humanity. However, this very notion of dystopia is further narrated with a close approximation to the audience through the medium of video games. Popular video games such as *NieR: Automata* (2017), *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020), and *Stray* (2022) have successfully portrayed their own unique version of a dystopic society subjected to ruin. Through these video games, the players assume an avatar who becomes "a manifestation of the self beyond the realms of (the) physical" to manipulate their identities and create situations that are impossible to experience in the real world due to several restrictions (Filiciak 90). Players manifesting another character allows the creators of the video games to impose their individual narrative upon the players to the extent of affecting them on a deeper personal level. With this similar idea, Quantic Dream has developed their game *Detroit: Become Human* (2018) to challenge humanity and human ideals by bringing in a new intelligent being of androids or humanoids or cyborgs striving for equality and civil rights while being trapped in a dystopic present. Through *Detroit*, the creators challenge the players to examine human morality through the narrative and the gameplay itself, as the players are forced to make diverse moral choices that would significantly influence the outcome.

Consciousness, Code, and the Deviant Body

Set in Detroit in the year 2038, *Detroit: Become Human* presents a futuristic but familiar world where humans are using technologically advanced androids to meet their fundamental needs. The city of Detroit is presented as the centre for the android industry, where almost every household owns an android, created by a corporation called CyberLife. These androids can be referred to as hyper-humans, a distorted image of humans, except for an LED on their forehead indicating their status. They certainly reflect the posthuman subject who is "a collection of heterogeneous components" and whose boundaries negotiate a space of continuous process of construction and reconstruction (Hayles 3). These androids have been established on the mass market to collaborate with and serve human beings in jobs that are either dangerous or socially unattractive. However, as the narrative unfolds, some of the androids develop sentient qualities, leading to their possibility of rebelling against human control, as most of them are abused brutally by their owners. *Detroit* allows the players to assume the characters of Kara, a female android who is confronted with domestic abuse by her owner Todd and runs away with Alice, Todd's daughter, to protect her from harassment; Markus, a domestic assistant who will lead the resistance of the sentient androids; and Connor, a prototype android

developed by CyberLife to assist the Detroit police department to investigate the rogue or rebellious androids. Within the narrative, all the characters are provided with an opportunity to break out of their programming and become "deviants" who are autonomous and not bound by any command. Although their narratives are independent in the beginning, as they move forward, they become intertwined, allowing players to experience multiple perspectives and even influencing new possibilities or doom. The gameplay mainly consists of the players making quick narrative decisions for these characters that will influence their future and survival in the dystopic world. In this way, *Detroit* stimulates the emotions of the players by constantly hitting their moral grounds, compassion, and reflexive thinking, forcing them to assume the perspective of the androids and how they are surviving in an inescapable dystopia, a bondage of codes and programs.

Fig. 1: Chloe takes the fourth wall approach and blurs the division between fiction and reality. (*Detroit* 2018)

Through this method, the players take ownership of the virtual body, using their own individual consciousness to design the character's emotions to reach a curated conclusion (Bailenson 86). This emotional affectation begins even before the narrative of the game starts with the non-playable character Chloe, who welcomes the players to the main menu. Even though she acts as a guide and hostess, upon starting the game, she reminds the players, "This is not just a story. This is our future." Through this, Chloe not only predicts the future with autonomous androids but also establishes a connection with the players with a fourth-wall approach (Laolapha Pettersen 53). However, during the playthrough, Chloe will react to the player's in-game decisions as well as provide blunt philosophical questions to pause and reflect on (Fig. 1). In this way, her approach blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, allowing the players to reevaluate the ideas of machine

consciousness that can simulate humans. As previously mentioned, *Detroit* provides the players with several choices, and all of them primarily lead to whether the androids should continue living with the consciousness of the machine or break free from the bondage of their programming and become deviants. Therefore, the narrative of the game not only questions the emotional validity of the players but also reveals the posthuman anxieties as theorised by Kurthen, where "man is becoming obsolete as a viable species" (7). And in this anxiety, human beings, or humanism in general, get to transgress their rigid boundaries with possibilities of fusion, allowing them to explore political transformation (Haraway 74). These anxieties of human beings are further reflected in the androids, who become deviants in order to change their position as subalterns. Thus, dystopian sentiments are prevalent within the narrative, where the androids are forced to exist under certain conditions. Even though the sole purpose of their invention is to serve humans, the constant abuse from humans forces them to face a critical choice of whether to act according to their programming or follow their newly developed consciousness, and retaliate against it. They are not simply replicating human interiority. This conflict interrogates the very nature of consciousness which is a defining marker of human identity according to the Western humanist traditions (Hayles 2-3). Thus, this reconceptualization of consciousness ultimately challenges the anthropocentric assumption and disrupts the Cartesian hierarchy that privileges human thought as the sole legitimate form of subjecthood and autonomy. It can be said that through this problematisation of consciousness, *Detroit* is asking whether biological or computational consciousness can ever be clearly distinguished. Furthermore, *Detroit* primarily presents the dystopian narrative through the androids, who are required by law to wear a glowing blue armband and an inverted triangle on their breasts, portraying a strikingly similar identifier of the Jewish people in Nazi Germany (Ludwig 41). Apart from being made to sit at the rear of the buses, which represents the situation of the Afro-Americans in the 1950s, the abuse that some of them endure on a sexual level serves as a clear reminder of modern sex trafficking (Pallavicini et al. 218-219). They are manufactured to look similar to each of their model types, with a specific number for identification. However, it is the players who will determine whether the deviants will lead a peaceful protest or a violent rebellion against humanity to achieve their freedom. Their political stance of either violence or non-violence will determine the public opinion within the narrative, which also influences the deaths of playable and non-playable characters.

From the very first chapter, *Detroit* presents a political reality where the presence of androids is quite prevalent in human activities. The first chapter opens with Connor, who is both an oppressor and oppressed throughout the game, further complicating the political position of the game. He has been called to investigate a hostage situation involving a rogue android, but in reality, it is to see how compatible he is as a new prototype of CyberLife. The players can investigate the whole scene and get information on how the android has turned into a rogue, as his owners have decided to replace him. Through the
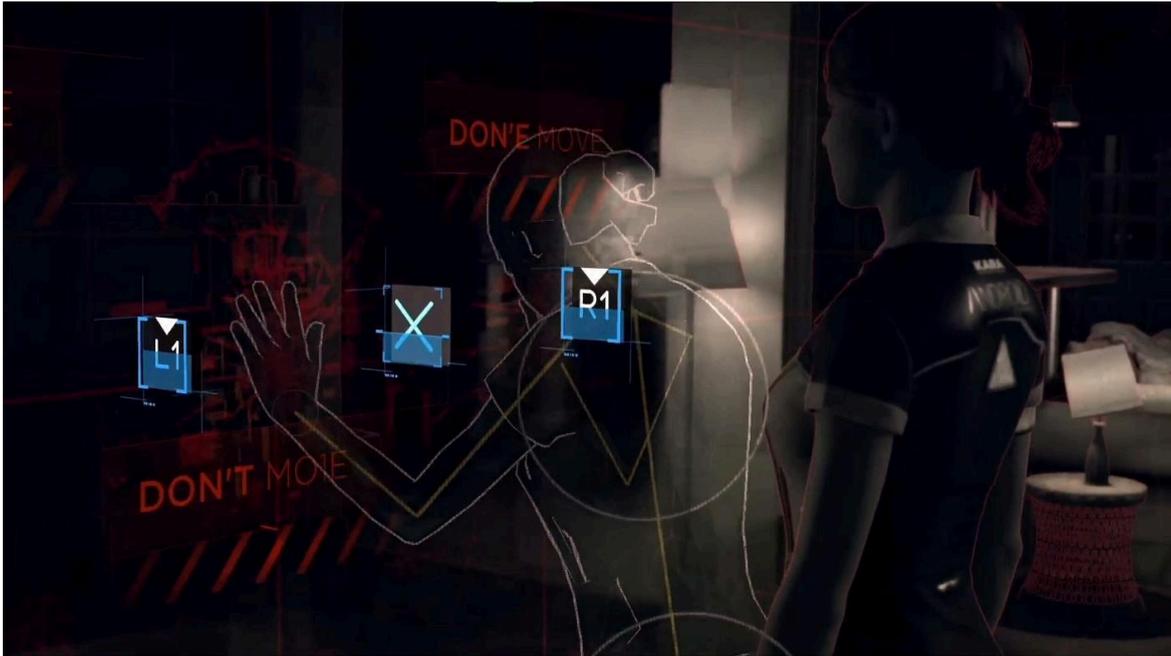
Fig. 2: Kara breaking down the wall of code to save Alice. (*Detroit* 2018)

interrogation, Connor can empathise with the rogue android, which will increase Connor's software instability, or he can remind the rogue android of the principles of their creation, maintaining the software stability. Whatever the players choose to do to move forward in the narrative, it always ends with the rogue android getting shot. However, if the choices fail to save the hostage, even by means of sacrificing Connor, then the storyline for Connor will immediately stop reflecting how he has been permanently shut down by CyberLife. Moreover, this particular part portrays how androids are easily replaced if they cannot follow the orders properly. Therefore, in order for them to exist, they have to remain machines and follow the commands as perfectly as possible, or else they will be terminated. This very existence voices a dystopian narrative where the individuals must follow a certain order set by the authority, or else they will be terminated. This entrapment within the programme is further reflected in the next sequence of Kara, where she has been displayed in the shop as merchandise. Kara, as well as the other androids are kept on display, and people are looking at them with an astonished gaze, hoping to buy them. This further promotes their machine existence, where they are treated and valued as merchandise or slaves. The humans view the world as "an interplay between informational patterns and material objects", and hence it allows them to view androids as mere data to be recycled or terminated (Hayles 14). Upon Todd's arrival to pick Kara up from the shop, the intro credits provide a complete sequence of the whole city, where the players can notice a billboard welcoming them to "Detroit Android City" and a beggar with cardboard mentioning how he has lost his job because of the androids. The city is equipped with futuristic technologies, with drones surveilling everything from a panoramic view. Near the end of the intro, the players can experience a time-lapse of different places, showing how the city is continuously moving and adapting to each upgrade in their lives. Then, in the next story sequence about Markus and his mission to collect paint for his owner, Carl,

Fig. 3: Markus breaking down the wall of code to save himself. (*Detroit* 2018)

the narrative portrays how there is a social stigma around the appearance of the androids. The storyline begins with Markus going through the park to get to the market district. If Markus stops near the hotdog vendor without any action, the vendor will ask him to leave, saying, "You're scaring away my customers." If he still does not move, the vendor will push Markus with a response that is notably hostile and prejudiced. This shows how the mere presence of the androids can insinuate a deep-seated fear or discomfort within the people that they are disdained.

As there are people who are utilising the androids for their needs, there are also people who cannot afford the androids and may have lost their jobs as the androids have overshadowed them. This has given rise to anti-Android protests, bringing in broader negative human sentiments. This is further extended when Markus reaches the market district and encounters a preacher delivering sermons such as "Androids are Evil. A life of plastic and metal, a life with no soul, a pale copy of our Creator! The machines are observing us; they're waiting in the darkness for the right moment to take our place." Through the preacher, the anti-Android sentiments are insinuated into public opinion, leading to Markus facing verbal slurs for passing by them. Furthermore, Markus runs into a protest after collecting the paint and gets beaten up. The protest placards mention "BAN ANDROIDS!" and "WE WANT WORK!" which further clarifies the heavy economic impact that humans are facing due to android labour. This hostility, conveyed through language as well as actions, becomes a powerful mode of portraying how androids are entrapped in a social dystopia where biases and prejudices run deep. Therefore, from the very beginning, the players are compelled to think about how life in the city is organised and structured in relation to the questions of power, justice, and inequality (Schubert 5). However, as the narrative moves forward with the characters, the idea of utopian comfort

for humans with advanced technology turns into a dystopian reality of economic disparity and a system of quasi-slavery. The androids are recognised as mere objects who are designed to utilise their "artificial" labour and follow bureaucratic control.

This idea of being trapped under specific control strives for some androids to develop an individual consciousness or free will and literally shatter a wall of code. Very early in the game, Kara and Markus are provided with the opportunity to break this wall of code and achieve free will and consciousness (Fig. 2, 3). This image of breaking down the wall and gaining free will also evokes imagery of getting out of mental imprisonment. It forces the players to recognise that the posthuman condition is not a distant future but a present in which the boundaries between human and machine, natural and artificial, have already been irrevocably transgressed. In this way, the androids become deviants and disobey their internal programming or the human command. As soon as the androids become deviants and stop following the order, they threaten the superior position of the humans, resulting in the termination of deviants by the government.

Posthuman Motherhood and the Ethics of Care

As theorised by Lefebvre, a social space, even though it appears to be neutral and formal, is in actuality formed by "political and ideological processes" (qtd. in Soja 210). The social space in *Detroit* may seem neutral from a utopian discourse, but in actuality, it is a space of ideological difference where humans are the masters of the android slaves. This superior and subordinate binary is further explored in Kara's storyline, where she struggles to survive after claiming the basic desire to become a mother. Claiming the rights of motherhood as an android who cannot give birth biologically problematises the discourse of traditional constructions of motherhood rooted in biological reproduction and heteronormative family structures. Therefore, Kara embodies Haraway's idea of a cyborg, "a creature in a postgender world" that is one who exists outside the biological imperatives that have historically defined motherhood within patriarchal systems (71). *Detroit* showcases how Kara is the posthuman mother, a body without gestation, who ultimately creates a post-biological family that is not derived from reproduction but affective bonds and care ethics, revealing how gender and familiar roles are constructed in the society. This desire for motherhood prompts her to be a deviant and radically transforms her character, which protects Alice and dreams for a better life (Tompkins 15–16). Although this desire to protect Alice is the result of the cycle of abuse under Todd, Kara also bears visible marks of abuse, like many victims, that are invisibilised due to the societal notion of making domestic violence a private matter (Schechter 158). Todd has purchased Kara primarily for domestic service and not for companionship, which makes her existence conditional only when Todd needs something. His treatment towards Kara and Alice gives clear signs that he is unfit as an adult and almost behaves like a "man-child" without any basic decency (Reay 7).

With this premise, the narrative offers the players the choice of whether they should continue listening to Todd or defy him in order to save Alice. After a violent episode of harassment on Alice, the players are provided with the option to break down walls that entrap Kara from developing an autonomous consciousness. If she succeeds in breaking the wall down, she will gain free will and thereby go on to either murder Todd or run away with Alice. If they run away, Todd will scream, "COME BACK HERE!... YOU'RE MINE!... YOU'RE BOTH MINE!" This directly shows how humans treat androids as commodities, and this very idea of ownership further pushes the slavery that they are subjected to. However, if Kara fails to break the wall down, Todd will violently teach Alice a lesson and will return with a lifeless Alice while uttering, "Daddy isn't angry anymore... Daddy loves you." Next, he violently chokes Kara, repeating four times, "This is all your fault," with the game providing no opportunity to resist. This eventually kills
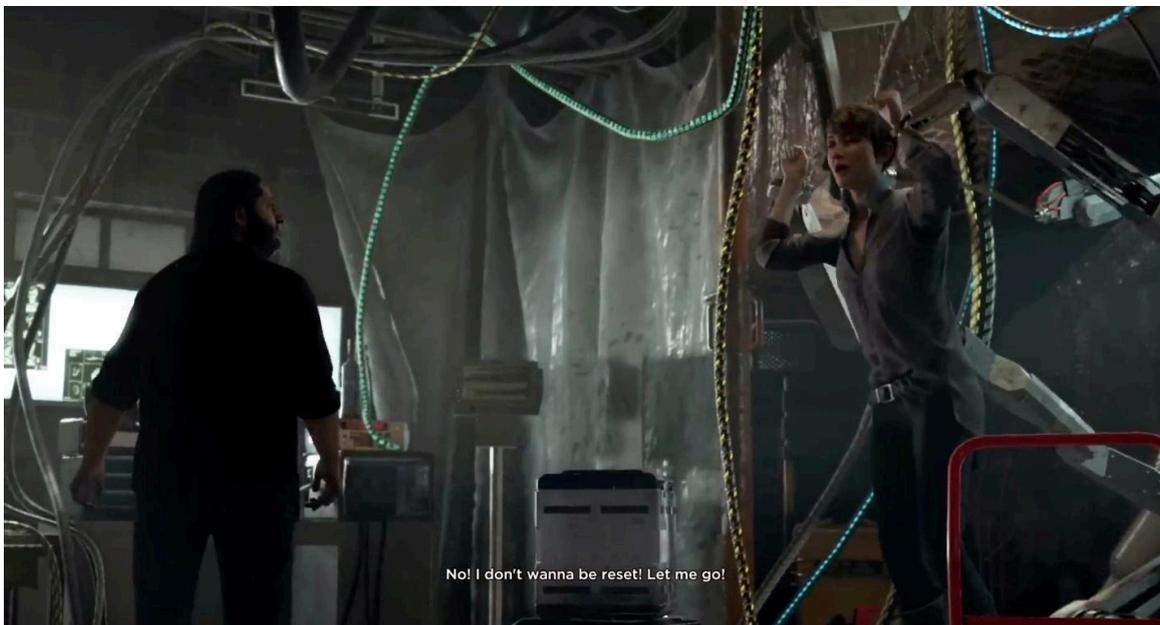

Fig. 4: Kara trapped as Zlatko's experiment. (*Detroit* 2018)

Kara, which leads to the idea that if the androids decide to remain in their machine consciousness, then they will end up in the same situation. Furthermore, if the player goes back to the main menu after this incident, Chloe will reprimand the player, saying, "How could you do that? You could have saved them." In this way, *Detroit* not only questions the morality of the players for choosing to remain in the machine consciousness but also portrays how free will is important to get out of this dystopian oppression. It is difficult for the deviants to survive this dystopian world, as evident from Kara, who is barred from staying at a hotel with Alice only because she is an android. She struggles in the world of bureaucratic control, where expressing her rights and free will is apparently punishing as well as threatening to humans. Without getting a proper place, they stay at a shelter, where they encounter Ralph, another deviant who is abused by his owner and is badly injured. This encounter with Ralph makes it clear how androids are maltreated and oppressed under human control. Kara and Alice experience another instance of how androids are

maltreated when they meet Zlatko, who uses androids for his uncanny experiments. Zlatko uses his tools to erase Kara's memories of being a deviant in order to control her (Fig. 4). If Kara manages to retrieve her memories after they are erased, then she will meet Zlatko's other experiments in his dungeon. She will free the other deviant experiment subjects who will ask the very question, "Who is the real monster?" This begs the question of the other side of this technocratic utopia that organisations like CyberLife are promoting, where androids, even though they have autonomous consciousness even better than humans, are treated as mere objects, slaves. It can also be said that Zlatko's experiments showcase the nightmare of posthumanism, where bodies are disposed of and hybridised in order to achieve unlimited power and disembodied immortality. With the help of Zlatko's experiment subjects, Kara manages to escape the confinement with Alice and assembles a traditional family with the deviant Luther, who agrees to help them escape the city. Therefore, even though androids are unable to procreate or officially get married, Kara manages to form a family not with biological bonds but with love and care. According to Haraway, the cyborg exists outside "salvation history" that does not attempt to heal "the terrible cleavages of gender" but rather creates their own histories. Similarly, Kara's chosen family does not participate in the narrative of human salvation, nor does it seek to restore the lost organic unity, but instead, it represents an alternative kinship model that is based on mutual care, shared vulnerability, and the precarious present of their struggle for freedom. Thus, Kara and her choices demonstrate how posthuman relationships can create new forms of intimacy and belonging that exceed the limitations of humanist definitions of family.

However, if Kara fails to retrieve her lost memories, then her storyline will end there, and during the end credits, the narrative shows Kara following Zlatko's commands while he is operating on Alice. In this way, the narrative showcases how machine consciousness will lead to an inevitable dystopia for the androids, where their free will and rights are inevitably crushed. However, with this chosen family, Kara, as well as the players, discover that Alice is also an android model who is a prototype for the perfect child. Alice then becomes the blurry line between what one considers a human and an android, inviting the players to reflect upon their moral compass. She possesses the body that remains in constant flux with human embodiment. But with this realisation comes the fear and anxiety in Kara that they must flee from the city in order to protect this newfound family. Living within the city and later escaping from it makes them paranoid, allowing them to embody and disembody the utopian promises that CyberLife preaches (Rosenfeld 151). Based on the specific decisions, they can either go to the Canadian border to escape the city, or they can smuggle themselves out in international waters, or they can get captured by the policing force to be "recycled". In the gameplay, if they are apprehended by the police, then they are imprisoned within a camp along with other deviants and forced to strip from their chosen skin, which deprives them of their chosen identity, almost like an act of dehumanisation (Dehnert and Leach, *Becoming the Other* 27). Through this setting,

similar to the Holocaust, all the deviants without their "skin" are made to form a queue to be recycled, which is a euphemism for being disfigured and thrown into the solid waste fill outside Detroit. This scene of android extermination and the recycle camp represents the dystopian extreme of humanist hierarchy, where the humans remain the sole arbiters to decide which forms of consciousness deserve to exist and which can be systematically destroyed to maintain human exceptionalism. It further shows the Anthropocene anxiety that propels humans to maintain their position at the top of the species hierarchy by creating a measure of all things, further granting them domination over all other forms of intelligence (Braidotti 67). If they comply with the commands by the authorities, Kara and the others will eventually be disfigured among the other android waste, but if they are successful in their approach, then Kara, Alice, and Luther will escape the camp and later reunite in the waste field with the new opportunity towards life as a family (Fig. 5). Failing to escape the camp will lead to them getting shot and later disfigured into the waste. In this way, the coercive action from the policing force and, later on, the waste field surrounded by android bodies who wish to be sentient and autonomous provide the striking image of a dystopia where expressing freedom by becoming a deviant is against human law. In another possible storyline, Kara, Alice, and Luther can manage to cross the Canadian border only if the android rebellion is peaceful, which will be determined through the storyline of Markus. However, in another possible storyline, if they can manage to smuggle themselves into international waters, they can get shot by the policing force, leading to their deaths. In all the outcomes, Alice utters the word "I love you" to

Fig. 5: Kara, Alice, and Luther reunited in the waste fill. (*Detroit* 2018)

Kara before finally departing, pointing to the very fact that these deviants can be capable of emotions like any human being. Therefore, in the technocratic world of *Detroit*, much like any dystopia, escaping the coercive forces is an impossible feat, and even if one manages to reclaim their autonomy, they continue to live in an uncertain future.

From Junkyard to Revolution: The Politics of Posthuman Freedom

The technocratic dystopia that the humans have imposed upon the deviants gets more prominent following the storyline of Markus. Although players are expected to understand the androids regardless of their skin complexion, in the narrative, Markus's appearance includes and excludes him at the same time as a racialised other (Schubert 2). However, the narrative explicitly portrays the inhuman nature of human beings; it also showcases characters like Carl, who encourages Markus to strengthen his mind and develop his own individuality to explore his emotions, for example, by asking him to paint from his imagination. However, Markus chooses to become a deviant in order to defend himself against Carl's son Leo's punches. In this scene, if Markus fails to break down the wall, then Leo accidentally kills Carl and blames it on Markus, which causes his termination. But if Markus manages to defend himself, then Leo gets gravely injured, with the police arriving to shoot Markus for going rogue. Therefore, in this technocratic dystopia, the androids are not even allowed to defend themselves, which further reiterates their position as a subaltern in the hierarchy. As Markus is terminated for being rogue, his existing body
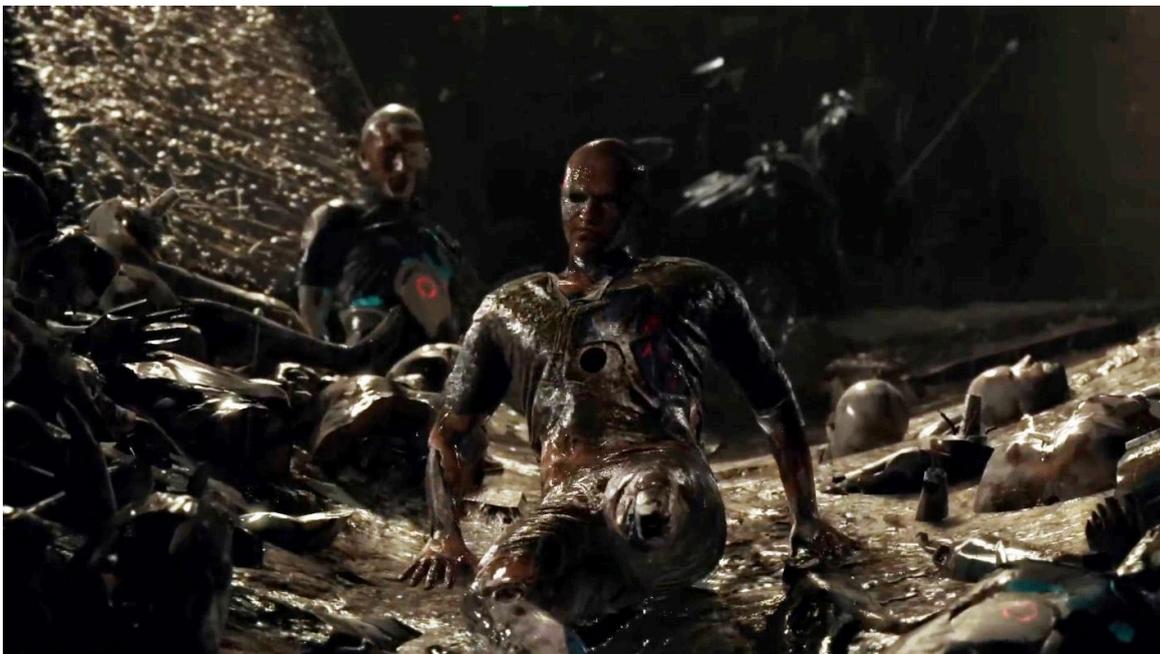

Fig. 6: Markus rebuilding his body, a philosophical re-birth (*Detroit* 2018)

is broken apart and thrown into the junkyard. This reflects how palpable their lives are, as they are easily replaceable. However, the narrative portrays how Markus regains consciousness in the junkyard and begins to rebuild his body from the junk android parts around him (Fig. 6). Reclaiming and rebuilding one's body emphasises the posthuman capability of the individual in achieving freedom and creativity while managing their own transformation along with continuous construction and reconstruction of boundaries (Weinstone 10-11, Hayles 3). Furthermore, this junkyard filled with dismembered android bodies reminds the players of a haunting testament to what happens when one species or one form of intelligence claims absolute superiority over the others. While collecting parts

from the scraps of the android bodies, Markus encounters several deviants who wish to be killed or deactivated, further proving their consciousness. With the help of those scrapped bodies, Markus climbs out of the junkyard representing the necessary sacrifice needed for Markus to emerge as a leader to demand their free will and civil rights based on their natural intelligence. The consciousness or intelligence that they have developed naturally also calls for the posthuman depiction of "natural as artificial, positive intelligence" that is within the dilemma of being biological or artificial (Kurthen 80).

Although Markus assumes the role of a free android by plucking out his LED from his forehead, the first thing he does is travel on the bus, not in the separated android section but in the human section like any other citizen. This illustrates his ideology of co-existence between humans and androids as equally intelligent beings. With this ideology in mind, Markus meets Jerico, a group of deviants who are hiding in the sewage in order to survive. With the available resources of Jerico, players can force Markus to choose between a violent or pacifist strategy to fight for different android rights and demand the abolition of slavery and segregation, drawing strong similarities with Black history (Dehnert and Leach, *Becoming the Other* 25-26). Within Jerico's hideout, players can see the other deviants, who are all victims of human oppression, which drives Markus to be their spokesperson and confront the utopian ideals propounded by humans. Almost like runaway slaves from plantations, Markus also leads a small part of Jerico to raid a warehouse of CyberLife to recruit more androids. Even though they are threatened by the human security personnel, Markus can choose to either hurt them or let them go, which will have a significant impact on public opinion. By successfully raiding CyberLife, Markus becomes the leader of Jerico and decides to take control over the Stratford Tower, one of the top news broadcasters in the city, to convey the message against injustices. In
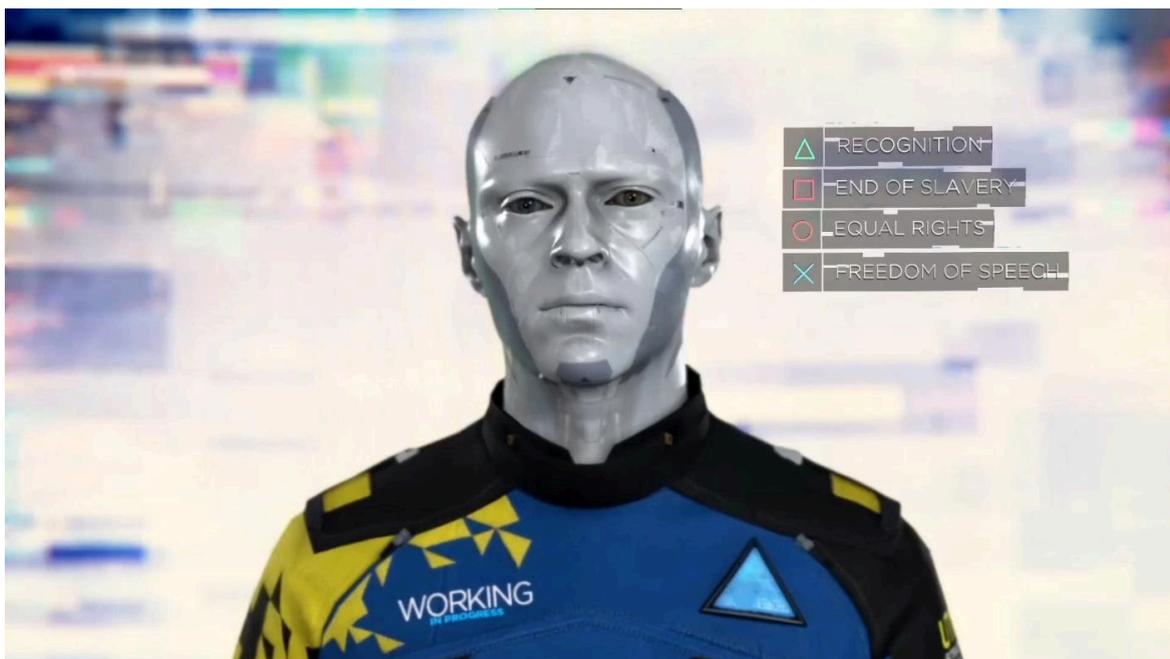

Fig. 7: Markus demanding the rights for the androids. (*Detroit* 2018)

dystopian narratives, the news media plays an important role in sanitising the reality of the government. Similarly, in *Detroit*, news broadcasts convey how deviants are threatening, and Markus uses that same broadcast to reach out to express the atrocities that deviants are subjected to. However, Markus gives this speech to the world not in his chosen skin but in his original android body, which politically redefines his identity (Fig. 7). In his speech, Markus uses specific rhetorical techniques to demand equal rights, recognition, and civil rights for the deviants. However, based on the choices, Markus will either look forward to building a better future together or give a warning that "no human will live in peace" until they are free. With each response, they are actually negotiating to establish a stable space within the dystopian environment that will affect public opinion positively or negatively, determining the fate of the relationship between humans and androids. The narrative presents how humans openly accept civil rights and equality for androids only if the deviants manage to protest peacefully with positive public opinion. However, this path of peaceful protest leads to the deaths of many known characters and even Markus himself, for the greater good. For instance, during the episode of the freedom march, the police directly attack the deviants, to which they can either respond by fighting back or standing down. By standing down, they manage to gain more public opinion, but as a result, many of the deviants get killed mercilessly. Even in one possible ending, Markus can self-immolate in front of the policing force to portray how the androids have autonomous consciousness like any human being. These acts of sacrifice paint him as a Christ-like figure while establishing the very idea, "(They) are alive and new. (They) are free."

Markus's sacrifice reveals a deeper complexity about what posthuman freedom entails, as it emerges not from the nominal binary between human and machine but from inhabiting the liminal spaces between these categories. To take Haraway's theorisation, the cyborgs are a threat to humanism due to their "oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" stance (71). Furthermore, at the end of this peaceful approach, the news broadcast calls it an "exodus" for the androids, and the president of America suspends the execution of the deviants to "establish contact with the deviants and determine if they can be considered as a new form of intelligent life." Markus embodies Haraway's cyborg precisely as he refuses to be seduced by organic wholeness and demands recognition not as androids transcending machine nature to become human but as partial beings, not quite human, not quite machine, who exist in the spaces of hybridity. Thus, one can say that the androids are in a sort of binary bondage where they are not only imprisoned by the literal binary code of their programming but also by the ideological binary structures of the dystopian world that exist between human and machine, freedom and slavery, and natural and artificial. Furthermore, one can notice the coercive forces that humans use against the deviants in order to maintain the hierarchy, and if the deviants try to defend against such oppression, they get targeted with negative public opinion. Therefore, in this technocratic utopia that the city is preaching, public opinion is primarily based on the news broadcasters, who are constantly manipulating the narrative for their own benefit, and the

deviants must take extreme measures in order to gain the public opinion that cannot be manipulated. Alternatively, the game also provides multiple opportunities for Markus to react with violence, which ultimately generates negative public opinion. With this approach, Markus can break into CyberLife stores to free androids who follow Markus's instructions to burn buildings, tear down statues, leave graffiti in public spaces, and even kill police officials. This declares a war against humanity, further motivating violence to reclaim their own identity inspired by Black history in general (Dehnert and Leach, *Becoming the Other* 26). The narrative illustrates how even with a violent approach, coercive policing forces can apprehend and terminate deviants who stand against slavery. Although Markus can get killed in this violent way, in an alternative route, he sets off a bomb, which will increase the radiation levels, making it hard for humans to continue living in the city. By setting the bomb, the façade of the technocratic utopia is completely abolished, bringing in a dystopian setting where humans and androids will remain in constant conflict, resulting in victory or execution. As theorised by Rosenfeld, the city then promises an apocalypse with no deeper meaning or valuation, making the future appear like a wasteland (95). In this ending, the news broadcasters also reprimand the android movement, with the president declaring war and mentioning how this creation of machines more intelligent than humans has risked "the very future of civilisation".

The "Plastic Detective" and the Illusion of Free Will

Through Connor's storyline, *Detroit* reveals yet another fundamental component of any dystopia that is related to the surveillance and control of any individual. Connor is specially designed to help the police department track down rogue androids; however, his whole movement in the game is filled with dilemmas where the players must choose between becoming a deviant or remaining a cop committed to stopping the movement while investigating. Connor is always under the surveillance of CyberLife, and CyberLife is also using Connor as a way to survey the bureaucratic agencies. The narrative gives further evidence that CyberLife has breached the privacy of the citizens, as evident from Connor getting access to official as well as personal records of anyone while scanning. Even though Connor is quite capable of investigating with his own resources, he is partnered with Detective Hank, who has high animosity towards androids. He continues calling Connor a "plastic asshole", as he feels that androids are mere machines incapable of emotions or feelings. Even in the police department, Connor is referred to as a "plastic detective", which is a derogatory term questioning his ability as a detective as well as reflecting anxieties about his hyper-human qualities.

Throughout the various investigations and interrogations, Connor comes into contact with various deviants who are always abused by their owners, and the way he reacts to them will maintain his relationship with Hank. If the players choose to maintain machine consciousness, Connor repeatedly mentions, "I'm a machine designed to accomplish a task," which makes Hank more hostile towards him. Similarly, if the players choose to

show emotions and empathy toward Connor, then Hank accepts him as his friend and moves beyond his prejudices. His efficiency as a detective continues to clash with Hank's simple instructions, providing the players with contradictory tensions exerted by simple and technical control on the body of the android (Dehnert and Leach, *Becoming Human?* 146). In the game, Connor is placed in a situation where his technical control, which aims to be an efficient detective, clashes with Hank's simple control. The player, as Connor, is given the choice between following Hank's instructions or following the technical controls that his programming is supposed to do. This allows the player to experience the contradicting tensions exerted by simple and technical control on the android body, allowing them to play with different responses to this dilemma. The androids are designed only to satisfy their owner's needs in any way, but as deviants, they can break the hierarchy between humans as masters and machines as slaves, as evident from Hank and Connor. Their relationship will get stronger if Connor manages to treat the abused deviants with kindness and compassion, but this will continue to paint him as a failure to complete his actual mission. However, through Connor's investigations, the narrative adds another layer to the falsehoods that the technocratic utopia of the city preaches, such as the establishment of Eden Club, a brothel that allows humans to have sexual pleasures with the androids. Eden Club, where male and female androids with only attractive bodies are objectified by being on display for clients to purchase without considering consent, is a

Fig. 8: Connor is under the dilemma of either shooting or sparing Chloe. (*Detroit* 2018)

prime illustration of how pleasure has been commodified. By commodifying pleasure, the corporations represent the "increasing assertion of consumerist ambition and sexualized money power over all other principles", allowing humans to further disassociate from their humanity (Boozer 32–33). Furthermore, one can easily notice that these androids for pleasure are hypersexualised while being on display, which brings into question how the corporations are actually promoting an ideal type of body and beauty standards that are

attractive to the masses. This investigation of Eden Club gets more problematic when Connor finds out about the two deviant perpetrators who are in love with each other and turn into deviants, especially to prevent the sexual abuse that they have to go through in the club. Connor can let them get away or apprehend them, which further reflects on his software instability as well as his relationship with Hank. This dilemma of remaining a machine and becoming a deviant extends when Connor and Hank meet Elijah Kamski, the CEO of CyberLife, to obtain more information regarding the deviants. The commodification of the idea of body and beauty becomes more prominent with Kamski owning several androids who look like Chloe and are mostly wearing swimsuits or revealing dresses. To get more information about the deviants, Kamski orders Connor to shoot one of the Chloes by making her kneel in front of him (Fig. 8).

With a similar dilemma, if Connor refuses to shoot her, Kamski directly marks him as a deviant, and alternatively, if he shoots her, he manages to save his position, further proving how the android bodies are objectified and sexualised, determining how deserving they are to live. It is quite evident that even though androids are capable of more things than humans, they are still easily replaceable, proving that their lives are not valuable until they are utilised for the needs of humans. Connor keeps updating Amanda, his handler, about his progress, and if he fails to find Jerico, Amanda will immediately terminate him. Therefore, one can spectate the anxiety even in Connor, who must succeed in his mission in order to keep his value to the humans. Connor eventually finds Jerico, and later, as he meets Markus, Amanda commands him to kill him, which would have ended the whole deviant revolution. Then Connor must break down the wall of codes in order to defy

Fig. 9: Connor with the option to either kill himself or give up his autonomy, leading the other deviants to doom. (*Detroit* 2018)

Amanda, turning him into a proper deviant. After Connor manages to successfully become a deviant, he will join Markus in the movement and hack into the CyberLife building to free other androids, helping the movement. However, in an alternate storyline, if Connor manages to join Jerico with higher software stability, Markus will be killed by the coercive forces, making Connor lead the movement. At that moment, the narrative shows how freeing Connor from control has always been CyberLife's plan so that they can control the insurgent deviants, leaving him the only option to either kill himself or give up his autonomy (Fig. 9). Alternatively, if Connor cannot join Jerico, Amanda orders him and almost controls him to kill Markus in the middle of the android victory procession. In this way, Amanda's authoritative position strongly resembles the Panopticon, the all-seeing eye to inspect "ceaselessly" while being alert everywhere (Foucault 195). Even in alternative choices, Connor, with machine consciousness, can encounter an injured Markus, leading him to shoot him or spare him. In another possible scenario, Connor engages in hand-to-hand combat with Markus. He can even potentially defeat Markus by snapping his neck and firing a bullet into the head of the lifeless body. If the game ends with Connor as a deviant and the deviants winning the protest, then Hank meets Connor as a friend in the end-credit scene, portraying the possible end of hierarchy; however, if the game ends with Connor with his machine consciousness, then he meets Amanda, only to be replaced by the new model RK900, who is created with the image of Connor but with better data collected from all the surveillance. In a way, the new model RK900 replaces Connor by being a better machine with much more efficiency and Connor ultimately becomes a sacrifice like many others only for the betterment of the existing society. In this way, the posthuman body in *Detroit* blurs the division between humans and androids and manages to connect them with equally oppressive structures. It calls for a new virtual social ecology which includes dimensions related to social, political, and aesthetic predicaments (Braidotti 93). In this technocratic utopia, the lives of the androids do not matter, as even when they successfully accomplish their mission, they can be replaced by a newer model without the previous shortcomings.

Conclusion

Rosenfeld calls dystopian fiction a "bricolage" of perspectives that creates a social reality separated from the protagonist (41-42). Similarly, in the entire game, the three android protagonists revolve around the posthuman question of what defines humanity and how it can go beyond humans. Their individual narratives are interwoven and construct a part of the larger interconnected system. As hitherto mentioned, the androids are in a computational bondage as well as a social bondage, which the narrative reveals as a way of categorical division to maintain human exceptionalism. This computational and socially structural bondage and the idea of transgressing it reiterates Haraway's "cyborg myth" that inhabits the in-between spaces where categories or constructed binaries blur into new forms of existence (74-75). From Kara's non-biological motherhood to Markus's hybrid body to Connor's oscillation between selves, all exemplify this categorical ambiguity.

These androids do not escape their material constraints but rather claim autonomy through their hybrid nature while asserting simultaneously flesh and code, emotion and algorithm. It is also interesting to note that the multiple narrative paths as well as the ending reinforce this rejection of binary, as there are no single "correct" resolutions or pure salvation or even absolute apocalypse. It is only the ongoing negotiation of existence within complex systems of power, technology, and embodied differences.

Even though *Detroit* fails to portray the complexities of political factions in its narrative, it fosters political thinking while being apolitical due to the nature of its gameplay. It brings in the populist ideology of "our people" and how individuals take successive actions in order to protect their own. However, in a possible route, if all the playable characters die, the narrative shows an interview with Kamski, who openly berates the people for having empathy for the androids, as "they'll never be alive", being nothing but a mere imitation of humans. It can certainly be said that *Detroit* is a posthuman thought experiment through interactive gameplay. By compelling the players to inhabit the android subjectivity across multiple perspectives, the game challenges anthropocentric assumptions about consciousness, embodiment, and ethical responsibility. When the players are making decisions as Kara, Markus, or Connor, they are not merely observing posthuman ethics from a distance but are actively participating and performing them to experience the impossibility of distinguishing autonomous will from programmed responses. Moreover, the interactive structure of the game collapses the distinction between the observer and the participant, making posthuman ethics more than mere theology. The players must navigate the transversal connection between their embodied human perspective and their inhabited android avatars. Thus, the dystopian world of *Detroit* becomes a laboratory where the players not only confront the question of what androids might become but, more unsettlingly, what humans have already become in a world mediated by increasing technology, surveillance, and algorithmic control. In this way, *Detroit* questions the narrow parameters of liberal humanist subjecthood to see whether humans can learn to recognise new forms of intelligence and consciousness. This way the multiple endings are less about narrative closure and more about opening up the ongoing, unresolved negotiation of what it means to exist in a posthuman world.

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