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POSTHUMANISM AND PLAYER AGENCY IN *DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN* AND *NIER: AUTOMATA*

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Abstract: The theme of androids – robots that resemble humans – obtaining characteristics traditionally associated with humans is not new to contemporary media, having been extensively explored in film, television and literature. These representations have frequently been analysed through the theoretical lens of posthumanism, which interrogates the boundaries between the human and non-human. However, when this theme is explored within the medium of video games, the posthuman condition acquires a more complex and interactive dimension. Unlike passive spectators of visual media, video game players are active participants who co-construct narrative meaning through gameplay. As games evolve in complexity and interactivity, the player's agency becomes integral to the game's unfolding, effectively transforming the player into the cyborg figure envisioned in Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*. This participatory role not only challenges the notion of a fixed human subject but also reconfigures the relationship between technology, identity, and embodiment. This paper will examine two games: *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream, 2018) and *NieR: Automata* (Square Enix and PlatinumGames, 2017), both of which foreground android protagonists within speculative futuristic settings. While these games thematically engage with the android's relationship to humanity, they also enact a subversion of traditional posthuman narratives. In both cases, the android characters exhibit distinctly humanistic values, such as empathy, morality, and self-sacrifice. Conversely, it is through the player's interaction –through choice, control, and emotional investment – that the games achieve their posthuman and transhuman dimensions. These texts suggest that the locus of posthumanism does not reside solely within the fictional android but is instead co-produced through the dynamic interface between player and machine.

Keywords: *Androids, game studies, posthumanism, agency, cyborgs, Detroit: Become Human*

In an era defined by pervasive digital technologies, the boundaries between humans and machines have become increasingly fluid. Contemporary video games provide a rich cultural site for examining this transformation, as they not only depict posthuman worlds but also embody posthuman experiences through interactive and immersive forms of play. Games invite players to inhabit hybrid identities and navigate complex systems that blur distinctions between the organic and the technological. Game texts therefore can also be seen as cultural artefacts where questions of identity and interactivity can be examined.

This paper examines two critically acclaimed video games: *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream, 2018) and *NieR: Automata* (PlatinumGames/Square Enix, 2017). Both feature android protagonists navigating dystopian futures in which their relationships with humanity, and with each other, form the emotional and philosophical core of the narrative. While these games appear to reinforce humanistic ideals through their android characters, they also complicate traditional understandings of posthumanism. Both *NieR: Automata* and *Detroit: Become Human* are narratives of the relationships that androids have with humanity, and their negotiation of what humanity means to them. The purpose of this paper is to examine these two titles from a posthumanist perspective to see how they conform or subvert these ideals. This paper argues that it is through player interaction, not merely through narrative content, that these games achieve their most significant posthuman dimensions. In both titles, the player does not merely observe or control posthuman characters – they become part of a cyborg interface in which human agency and technological systems converge. Through an exploration of the role that player choice and agency figure into these games, the paper explores how they embody the posthuman condition through gameplay.

There are certain themes that are common to stories where androids play a significant role, whether in Asimov's short stories – developed into films like *I, Robot* and *Bicentennial Man* – or in television series like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, where Lt. Data is often the centre of existential doubt. Whenever androids feature heavily in a story, one can trace the following central conflicts: firstly, they often contain an exploration of the dangers of human ingenuity and evolving technology, closely related to the fear of Strong AI. They focus on the idea that artificial intelligence is capable of outperforming humans to the point of supplanting humanity as the dominant species. Within these narratives, androids are frequently portrayed as acquiring or desiring traits traditionally associated with human subjectivity – empathy, free will, self-awareness, and moral reasoning. Such representations have been widely analysed through the critical framework of posthumanism, which interrogates the boundaries between the human and the non-human in an age increasingly mediated by technology. These narratives question what it means to be human, and the very idea of personhood itself, in a society where androids, an artificially created intelligent species, are a reality. Relatedly it also becomes necessary to examine the consequences of human exceptionalism, especially when it comes to the idea of androids working for human masters being closely related to slavery. The shifting definitions of inhumane treatment gives rise to space for new prejudices and interspecies conflicts.

This recurring anxiety surrounding the autonomy of artificial beings speaks to broader cultural concerns about technological advancement and moral responsibility. The android often functions as a mirror for humanity, reflecting both our aspirations and our fears. In Asimov's works, for instance, the "Three Laws of Robotics" are intended as safeguards against rebellion, yet they simultaneously expose the limitations of human ethical systems

when applied to non-human intelligence. Similarly, in *Bicentennial Man*, the android Andrew Martin's quest to be legally recognized as human foregrounds the instability of the category of "humanity" itself, suggesting that consciousness, creativity, and emotion are not exclusive to biological life. In *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Lieutenant Commander Data's ongoing struggle to understand emotion and morality dramatizes the philosophical question of whether humanity is defined by biology or by behaviour, by form or by function. Through such characters, science fiction offers a space to examine how empathy, identity, and autonomy might persist, or even evolve, beyond the human body.

However, when these themes are explored within the medium of video games, the implications become more complex. Unlike film or literature, where the audience is a passive observer, video games place the player in an active, participatory role. This interactivity fundamentally alters the relationship between narrative, character, and consumer. The player is no longer simply witnessing an android's struggle for personhood but is instead inhabiting it: making decisions, exercising moral judgement, and shaping outcomes within the parameters of a simulated world. The boundary between human and machine is not only thematically represented but experientially enacted through gameplay.

As games become more narratively rich and technologically sophisticated, they offer not just stories about the posthuman condition but immersive experiences in which the player embodies this condition. Games such as *Detroit: Become Human* or *NieR: Automata* exemplify this shift. In these games, players control androids who grapple with questions of freedom, consciousness, and moral agency, and the outcomes of these stories depend on player choices. The player, interfacing through a digital avatar, occupies a hybrid position, reconfiguring the notion of agency itself. This shift repositions the player as a cyborgian figure, blending the organic and the synthetic, both in representation and in practice.

In this sense, video games not only depict posthumanism but perform it. They transform the act of storytelling into an embodied, interactive negotiation between human player and machine system, making the posthuman condition not merely a speculative theme but a lived experience within the digital realm.

Posthumanism, the Cyborg, and Video Games

As we look into the concept of posthumanism with regards to how it can be applied to the games in question, it is perhaps apt to understand the difference between the idea of the post-human and posthumanism. A post-human is an extension of the concept of transhumanism and defined as a new, hybrid species of future human, modified by technology. It is the pinnacle of the blurred distinctions between human and machine. Posthumanism, on the other hand, can be defined as the study of that very blurring of distinction between human and machine. It is through posthumanism that the study of the android in media gains a new perspective and a new means of understanding. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whose work heavily influenced Yoko Taro in the creation of *NieR:*

Automata, mentions the idea of the Übermensch in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the idea of "overcome man," a species evolved from humanity but also having overcome it. This is, in essence, what an automaton, the new human, represents.

To elaborate, the post-human is often theorized as the next stage in human evolution: an entity that integrates biological and artificial components to transcend the limits of the human condition. Transhumanism envisions this transformation as progress, an optimistic pursuit of enhancement through technology, medicine, and artificial intelligence. In contrast, posthumanism does not necessarily look toward the future but critically examines the assumptions that define humanity in the present. In this context, Nietzsche's Übermensch serves as a philosophical precursor to the posthuman, symbolizing both transcendence and rupture. The android, like the Übermensch, embodies the paradox of human aspiration; it seeks to surpass humanity while forever remaining its reflection, an artifact of the very species it seeks to overcome.

Posthumanism challenges the privileged position of the autonomous, rational human subject central to Enlightenment humanism. Scholars such as Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles have questioned the anthropocentric view that defines humans as ontologically distinct from animals, machines, or artificial intelligences. Haraway's seminal *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) introduces the cyborg as a hybrid figure that destabilizes binary oppositions – human/machine, nature/culture, physical/virtual – by embodying elements of both. The cyborg, for Haraway, is a metaphor for the fragmented, networked, technologically embedded subject of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Rather than viewing technology as something external to humanity, Haraway argues that humans have always been entangled with machines. The cyborg thus becomes a powerful symbol for a posthuman condition in which clear boundaries between the organic and the mechanical, the natural and the artificial, are no longer tenable. This figure challenges traditional humanist assumptions about identity and autonomy, replacing them with an understanding of subjectivity as hybrid and conditional.

Hayles expands on this by exploring how information and embodiment are inseparable in the construction of consciousness. In *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), she argues that technological mediation does not diminish humanity but reconfigures it, creating distributed and interdependent systems of subjectivity. For Hayles, the posthuman condition emerges not from abandoning the human body but from recognizing how humans and machines co-evolve through continuous feedback loops of communication. She critiques the idea that the human mind could be reduced to pure information transferable between bodies or systems. Instead, Hayles insists that embodiment grounds meaning and experience, and that technological mediation transforms, rather than erases, this embodied subjectivity. Hayles's work situates posthumanism as a critical lens for reimagining the human in an era defined by information technologies. Rather than rejecting the human, she calls for a more nuanced understanding of how technology and

embodiment mutually constitute one another. This perspective positions the posthuman not as an alien or artificial other, but as a complex, hybrid subject emerging from the ongoing entanglement of biology and technology. These theoretical approaches frame posthumanism not as a rejection of the human but as a reconsideration of what it means to be human in technologically saturated environments.

In both *Detroit: Become Human* and *NieR: Automata*, the figures of androids – artificial humans that they are – are used to explore what it means to be human. In the former, there is a crisis created by androids emulating humanity too closely - the idea of humanity being defined by adherence to family values, displaying human traits like empathy and affection, and so on. In the case of the latter too, the androids 'consciously' try to be like their human gods, dressing up like them, putting on plays, conforming to human ideas of gender despite being agendered by nature, all without actually having an understanding of the reasoning behind them. It is suggested that it is this return to humanism, the vestiges of an extinct humanity, that is going to lead to the ultimate destruction of the androids as well, therefore signifying a movement towards the posthuman as the solution.

Androids are People too: The Case of *Detroit: Become Human*

Detroit: Become Human is an adventure game written by David Cage and released by Quantic Dream in 2018. Like other Cage games (*Heavy Rain*, *Beyond: Two Souls*), *Detroit* relies heavily on a system of player choices that affect the narrative and create several complex, branching storylines, resulting in varying outcomes and multiple endings. The story, set in 2038, talks about a world in which androids, developed by the company CyberLife, have become ubiquitous in society and fulfil a number of tasks primarily meant to assist humans. In this near-future however, human sentiment towards androids is ambivalent bordering on averse, as they have begun to replace humans in several fields. At the outset, the game tells us that some androids become 'deviants', rebelling against their programming that tells them to obey humans at every turn, instead developing a unique consciousness, sense of identity, and free will of their own. The narrative follows three androids – Connor, Markus and Kara – and their varying levels of involvement in a rebellion against the treatment of androids by humans. While Markus becomes the actual leader of said rebellion and Kara is only marginally involved in it, Connor is a law-enforcement android, and he can either side with the rebellion or actively work against it, depending on the player's choices.

With a story that can easily be applied to other kinds of societal prejudice, the narrative of *Detroit* is largely allegorical, often heavy handed with its messaging that draws on both historical and contemporary struggles for civil rights. Markus leads a peaceful (or violent, depending on player choices) protest against the humans for android liberation, becoming a 'civil rights' leader in a movement that greatly resembles race struggles in the United States. Markus can embody the peaceful protest espoused by Martin Luther King Jr, or a violent one along the lines of Malcolm X and the Black Panther Movement. At one point,

the player is given the choice between three slogans for the revolt, out of which one is "We have a dream", a less allegorical reference to the Civil Rights Movement. The second character, Kara, is a caretaker model of android who develops a motherly bond with her ward Alice – this bond is what eventually leads to her becoming a deviant, ready to disobey orders from her master in order to protect the child. It is revealed later in the game that Alice is also an android, which suggests that 'deviant' androids are capable of forming familial bonds with each other. Finally there is Connor, who is the first character that the player is introduced to. Connor is a police officer, tasked with identifying and negating the deviant androids. It is largely up to the player whether he ends up joining the cause of his fellow androids or remains loyal to the humans.

The game's themes lend easily to posthumanist analysis, as it focuses so deeply on the idea of whether biology determines humanity or whether characteristics like empathy and morality can be technologically evoked. Further, its hyperrealistic visuals and emotionally charged storytelling evoke empathy for non-human beings, inviting players to see machines as capable of moral depth. By mirroring real-world issues of race and social inequality, *Detroit* critiques how humans project hierarchies and prejudice onto others, even artificial ones. In doing so, the game becomes a reflection on posthuman ethics, suggesting that the boundaries separating humans and machines are not fixed, but constantly evolving through technological and social interaction.

Elements of posthumanism become more visible on the ludic level, where the player is the cyborg interacting with the machine, that is the game console. The player's identity constantly switches between the three characters, often forcing them to inhabit multiple perspectives at the same time, with a strong emphasis on player agency. The consequences of a player's actions are clear in the space of the game. For instance, during the very first chapter of the game when Connor is investigating a case where a caretaker android has taken a human girl hostage, the outcome of the final negotiation with the android depends on the player's skill. It is only through a thorough investigation of the level and an ability to read context clues during the negotiation that it can have a positive outcome – in this case convincing the rogue android to release the girl. Failing to do so does not result in an instant 'Game Over' but allows the narrative to continue, and players will have to revisit the consequences of their actions later in the game. During other sequences of the game, Connor can be killed – again as a result of player choices and their ability to successfully navigate skill checks made of button presses – and be replaced by newer versions of his model at any point in the story, but the level of 'humanity' he has attained, and his relationship with his human partner Hank, is reset each time, leading to different choices being available in multiple scenarios. During an encounter with Elijah Kamski, the creator of CyberLife, Connor (controlled by the player), can choose to choose to spare or shoot an android in order to gain information vital to his investigation. In choosing whether to fulfil their priorities with regards to the gameplay or "show empathy", the player's morality is tested as much as Connor's is.

Similarly, the deaths of other main characters do not lead to game over scenarios either, but the game does subtly punish the player for failing to play well or making bad choices throughout. Kara's story simply ends if she or Alice don't survive, the player can no longer experience their storyline. If the player's actions lead to the death of Markus, the story goes on, only the player no longer has a choice between a peaceful protest or a violent rebellion. Markus' companion North leads the android revolution in his place, choosing a path of open violence against humans where Markus could have had a choice between that and a non-violent path. The level of humanity that Connor has reached – something that is determined by both player skill in keeping him alive and making good moral choices – also affects the player's choices towards the end of the game, as a Connor who does not 'become human' or, specifically, a *deviant*, will not be able to access the options that allow him to help Markus's rebellion succeed, nor will he attain the most satisfying ending for his friendship with Hank.

The player therefore has the choice between playing as a 'good' character, making morally ethical choices or the 'evil' route that ends in tragedy. The player also has a choice to go back and replay sections with the choices they did not take if they wish to enact a power fantasy. The branching narrative system that allows players to make these choices is one of the primary mechanics of *Detroit*. It creates a sense of moral responsibility and emotional investment – most interestingly, this manifests in the way that Chloe, an android on the menu screen who interacts with the player every time the game is launched, often reacts well or poorly to choices made during the gameplay. If the player allows for characters to get killed, or makes choices that reflect a disdain for androids, Chloe's dialogues and expressions reflect her own 'disappointment' with the player. At one point, she references the concept of player choice directly. "Are you familiar with Schrödinger's cat? Until you decide what happens, everything is happening at once... like in *Detroit*." (*Detroit: Become Human*)

These concepts of player choice are closely related to the posthuman postulates that demand an empathetic and informed position towards the problems of marginalised humans and non-humans, as well as reinforcing the idea of a moral binary that is also coded in a lot of posthuman readings. Returning to Haraway and the *Cyborg Manifesto*, the evolution of 20th century technology has led to the blurring of boundaries between the animal and the machine. The machine in this case influences the behaviour of the player in a meaningful way, by presenting them with the opportunity to view these varied choices.

However, it is also to be noted that these choices are not absolute, but many are instead machine scripted. One of the ways in which the game forces players into making certain decisions is through 'skill checks' or quick time events that evaluate their skill during certain scenarios. The player's skill at playing the game – not missing quick time events (or QTEs), which are context-sensitive events where the game displays a button that the

player must press on their controller within a stipulated time frame (Domsch 2013, p. 36) – has a direct impact on whether the game will allow the player to attain the 'good' ending at all. The human agency, then, is controlled by the machine. Domsch points out that QTEs, which almost always occur during cinematics, are infamously a way to limit player agency; however, where these games succeed is in convincing players that actions are meaningful and creating an 'illusion' of agency, while the presence of flowcharts and decision maps exposes the game's algorithmic logic, once again reminding players of the system beneath the narrative and hinting at the posthuman infrastructure that sustains the game world.

Humanity and the Machine in *NieR: Automata*

2017's *NieR: Automata* is an action role-playing game and a sequel to *NieR* (2010), a spinoff from the *Drakengard* series created by Yoko Taro. The game is set ten thousand years in the future, following two elite YoRHa androids – the female attack model 2B and the male 'scanner' 9S in a proxy war to reclaim the earth for their human masters who have retreated to the moon. Their enemies are "machine lifeforms" who have been sent by an invading alien army. However, after encountering machines who are as intelligent and complexly emotional as they are, the two androids begin to question the purpose of the war and the legitimacy of the Council of Humanity. Their self-questioning comes to a head as they discover that not only are the aliens long extinct, but so are the humans, who manufactured the YoRHa units to serve only as disposable morale boosters within a meaningless, perpetual cycle of war.

The game's protagonists 2B, 9S, and A2, are embroiled in cycles of violence, memory loss, and betrayal. Each character confronts existential questions: What is the purpose of life when creators are gone? What defines an individual when memories are transferable? The game refuses to resolve these questions neatly, reflecting a posthuman condition where identity is unstable, and meaning is contingent. Similar to *Detroit*, *Automata* also forces the player to question what it means to be human – if the ability to empathise or feel pain are distinctive to the human experience, then what is left of the distinction between human and machine?

The game's narrative, while seemingly linear, splits off into sections that it calls Routes A, B and C in which the player controls one of the three YoRHa units. The player must experience all three of these routes to complete the game, and all of the routes lead to corresponding endings. The gameplay also embodies the idea of posthumanism, breaking the fourth wall on several occasions by acknowledging the presence of the player and the player's impact on the narrative. The game forces players to "die" and replay events multiple times, each cycle revealing new truths. This design foregrounds the artificiality of identity and linear narrative. Players are required to complete multiple endings to reach the "true" ending, reinforcing the idea that understanding emerges through iteration and multiplicity rather than singularity.

In the game's finale, all three playable characters have "died" in some way – through the corruption of their data, or the destruction of their body. The final battle of the game is a fight against the machine itself. The game asks the player a series of existential questions that also break the fourth wall: "Is it all pointless? Do you admit there is no meaning to the world? Do you think games are silly little things?" (*Nier:Automata*) In order to proceed beyond this point, the player must answer no to these questions. The narrative therefore requires the player to take a clear stance: no, it is not all pointless, no there is meaning in the world, and no, games are not silly little things. Player choice is thus secondary to the overarching point of the gameplay, which is commentary on games themselves.

When the final credits roll, the player is presented with a choice. The game has had multiple endings that the player can discover through varied actions, but what is interesting is that the final 'boss', the enemy that the player must defeat in order to attain completion of the game, are the *credits*. It is only by shooting up the rolling credits of staff and crew who worked on the game that the player is given the choice of sacrificing their game data for the sake of other players. The player is informed that other players have done so, deleting their saves permanently to offer their help. If the player chooses to delete their game data, they can upload a message of encouragement that future players may see during their fight against the credits and then watch their progress fade away on the game's main menu. The sense of immersion is complete, the player, like thousands or perhaps millions, of others, are active participants in the creation of meaning in the game. They are cyborgs in the truest sense, part of the machine.

Video games like *Automata* give us a way to look into our current relationship with technology and also give us a way to imagine what this relationship can evolve into. The act of playing a video game is, as we have seen, an instance of this relationship. As Zhou states in her analysis of the game, "*Automata* is simultaneously about humans and technology, and players and games, and in its portrayal, one relationship cannot be separated from the other" (8). There is, through gameplay mechanics, an intentional blurring of the lines between human and machine, player and game.

The Cyborg Gamer

In his influential work *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (2007), Ian Bogost introduces the concept of procedural rhetoric, a theory that explains how games communicate ideas and arguments through their procedures, that is the rules and systems that govern player interaction. Unlike traditional media such as film or literature, which rely on visual or linguistic representation, video games persuade and express meaning through the actions they require the player to perform. In other words, games are procedural systems: they simulate complex processes, and players learn about these systems by participating in them.

Bogost argues that the very act of playing creates meaning. The player does not passively receive a message but enacts it through interaction with the game's systems. For example, a game about resource management might implicitly critique capitalism or environmental exploitation not through dialogue or visuals alone, but through the procedures that govern scarcity, reward, and labour. Thus, the "rhetoric" of a game lies in how its rules and mechanics shape player experience and encourage reflection on social, political, or ethical structures. In this sense, procedural rhetoric positions video games as unique expressive forms—ones that engage players cognitively, emotionally, and ethically through participation rather than observation.

In the essay "Embodiment and Interface", Andreas Gregersen and Torben Grodal propose that "player actions fuse with the audiovisual information" of a game through interface (65). They put forward the idea that the act of interacting with video games "may lead to a sense of extended embodiment and a sense of agency that lies somewhere between the two poles of (body) schema and (body) image (…) This process is a fusion of the player's intentions, perceptions and actions" (67). Body schema in this context refers to the perception of one's own body, including information from visual and sensory cues, whereas body image refers to one's perception of what makes up one's own body. Therefore, when a player is playing a game, the perception of their own body extends to the virtual depictions of the player character in the game. This is further amplified when the act of inputting certain comments leads to a response from the game character. The controller, mouse or the keyboard that players use to control characters or make decisions in the game become extension of their limbs and therefore incorporated into their sense of embodiment, similar to the use of a pen or another tool (68). Further, they point out the link between perception and action – the way a player's motor systems are activated in response to the character's actions within the game world. There is thus an incorporation of gaming technology into the player's body that results in the merging of the player and game.

Hayles talks about the human beings as being "seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines" (3) when she writes that

> In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals (3)

Therefore, according to Hayles, machine terminology such as programming and data can also serve as metaphors for human functioning, indicating the parallels between how we understand human processes and those of machines. Humans, thus, can also be seen as intelligent machines much in the way that androids are.

It is undeniable that technology is deeply interwoven into our everyday lives. Hayles sees this as part of a "distributed cognitive system" (289). Drawing on Edwin Hutchins's metaphor, she describes a ship's human navigator who relies on mapping and positioning

technologies to steer the vessel. Neither the navigator nor the ship's instruments alone could determine the ship's precise location or guide it successfully; only together do they form a unified cognitive system capable of navigation (289–290). This perspective – that humans and technology extend and enhance each other's capabilities, offers a way to understand how technology permeates every aspect of our daily lives and also explains how material realities shape those experiences.

Playing a video game is also part of this "distributed cognitive system" in that through the act of play, a player maintains a connection through gaming technology and their senses of sight, sound and touch, a connection that cannot be separated throughout the experience of playing. The player is not only physically connected, but also connected through their consciousness, constantly taking in visual, audio and text cues from the game and reacting to them. These reactions are in turn bound by what the gaming technology and algorithm wants them to do, reacting in turn to the player's actions and choices, creating a constant feedback loop.

Hayles challenges the traditional humanist notion of what it means to have an essence when she postulates that "if human essence is freedom from the wills of others, the post human is 'post' not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will" (4). This is to say that within humanist thought, essence is often equated with autonomy, that is the ability to think and act freely and independently. Freedom is defined as separation: the capacity to make decisions that are entirely one's own and unshaped by the wills of others. Within the posthuman condition, however, this idea is complicated further. If, as Hayles says "essence is freedom from the wills of others" (4), then the posthuman subject cannot possess such an essence because there is no single isolated will that can be neatly separated from the influence of external systems, technologies or other beings. Human agency in the case of the posthuman is always entangled with nonhuman forces that shape consciousness and decision making.

Hayles's insight reflects a broader shift in how subjectivity is understood in the age of digital technology and cybernetics. The posthuman being is not a bounded, autonomous individual but part of a complex network of relationships and exchanges. For example, our actions are increasingly mediated by technological systems that influence our choices and perceptions - from the algorithms that curate our digital experiences to the infrastructures that determine how we move, communicate, and even think. In such a world, it becomes impossible to identify a single, pure "self will" that exists independently of these systems. The human mind itself becomes part of a "distributed cognitive system," where cognition and decision-making are shared across human and nonhuman agents.

Significantly, Hayles does not suggest that this interdependence makes the posthuman "unfree." Rather, she redefines freedom and subjectivity altogether. If human agency is always relational, then freedom cannot be understood as independence. Instead, freedom

becomes a matter of negotiation and awareness within these interconnections. The posthuman self acts not in isolation but in collaboration with the systems it inhabits.

To think of this in terms of play, the self can be understood as a player of games. A player operates within rules, systems, and environments that both enable and constrain action. The player's "freedom" is never absolute; it depends on the structure of the game, the limits of the code, and the actions of other players. Yet this does not mean the player lacks agency. On the contrary, play is a dynamic negotiation between constraint and creativity, between what the system allows and how the player interprets or subverts those allowances. Similarly, the posthuman self exercises agency, not by existing outside of systems, but by navigating and manipulating them from within. A person interacting with a digital interface, for example, does not act in isolation. Every decision is co-produced by algorithms, feedback systems, and the parameters of the interface. The self, in this sense, "plays" the system, but is also played by it.

Alexander Galloway's conception of video games as an action-based medium provides a framework for understanding how *Detroit: Become Human* and *NieR: Automata* reflect posthuman identity through interactivity. In *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, Galloway argues that video games differ from other media because they require continuous physical and cognitive inputs that merge human intention with computational logic. "Without action, games remain only in the pages of an abstract rule book. Without the active participation of players and machines, video games exist only as static computer code. Video games come into being when the machine is powered up and the software is executed; they exist when enacted." (2) Gameplay, in this sense, is not simply representational but performative. This aligns closely with Hayles's notion of the posthuman as a "distributed cognitive system," in which meaning and agency emerge through the cooperation of human and machine (Hayles 289). In *Detroit: Become Human*, the player's moral decisions exist within an algorithmic framework that interprets, records, and responds to every action. The interface becomes, as Galloway suggests, a "threshold" where human subjectivity and digital procedure overlap. Similarly, in *NieR: Automata*, every act of control or failure to control is an enactment of this posthuman performance, collapsing distinctions between player and system. Galloway's theory thus underscores that the posthuman condition in these games is not simply depicted but *enacted* through the player's embodied engagement with the code that structures their experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what this paper would like to posit is that while both *Detroit: Become Human* and *NieR: Automata* are posthuman in the sense that they represent androids as more humane than humans, the true posthuman depth lies not in representation but in interactivity. As N. Katherine Hayles argues, the posthuman subject is not a disembodied consciousness or an autonomous agent but a "distributed cognitive system" — a network in which human and machine co-produce knowledge and action (288–90). Both games

enact this idea by highlighting player agency and situating the player within the very circuits of decision-making, morality, and emotion that define the androids' existence. By involving the player in the existential and philosophical stakes of their narratives, they transform the act of gameplay into a lived exploration of posthuman embodiment.

Detroit: Become Human, while involving the player in shaping the outcome and allowing them to choose among multiple branching narrative paths, ultimately retains a clear moral structure. The game extends humanist ideals into the posthuman realm: empathy, freedom, and moral responsibility are still central values, merely relocated into android bodies. In this sense, the player becomes a participant in what Hayles would call a "human–machine cognitive assemblage" (33) where agency is shared between human input (the player's decisions) and algorithmic design (the game's structured moral pathways). The player's freedom is real but also conditional, bounded by a system that still privileges recognizable humanist ethics. The game thus offers a posthuman experience that remains tethered to an underlying belief in the moral coherence of human values.

NieR: Automata, however, destabilizes this logic. Rather than granting moral choice, it reveals the limits of agency itself, echoing Hayles's claim that in the posthuman condition, "there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will" (4). The player, like the androids they control, acts within a system whose rules and repetitions continually undermine the illusion of autonomy. Donna Haraway's concept of the *cyborg* is crucial here: the player's experience embodies a cyborgian fusion of organism and machine, where boundaries between self and system blur. As Haraway writes, "the cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (150). The player's consciousness is thus inseparable from the game's mechanics; decision-making becomes a feedback loop of affect, control, and surrender. *NieR: Automata* enacts posthumanism not as moral liberation but as systemic entanglement, where meaning emerges from the recognition of one's embeddedness within technological and narrative constraints.

Therefore, in both *Detroit: Become Human* and *NieR: Automata*, one can conclude that the posthuman is not merely a subject within a narrative but a condition enacted through play. The traditional ideas of posthumanism are subverted: instead of deconstructing the human, these games reconfigure humanity by merging human values with machine bodies and digital interfaces.

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