UNIVERSITETET I AGDER

“More Human Than Humans” – How Video Games Play an Important Part in Socio-Critical Discussions.

Comparing and Contrasting the Notion of Humanity and Emotion in *Detroit: Become Human* and the *Blade Runner* universe.

TANYA LAOLAPHA PETTERSEN

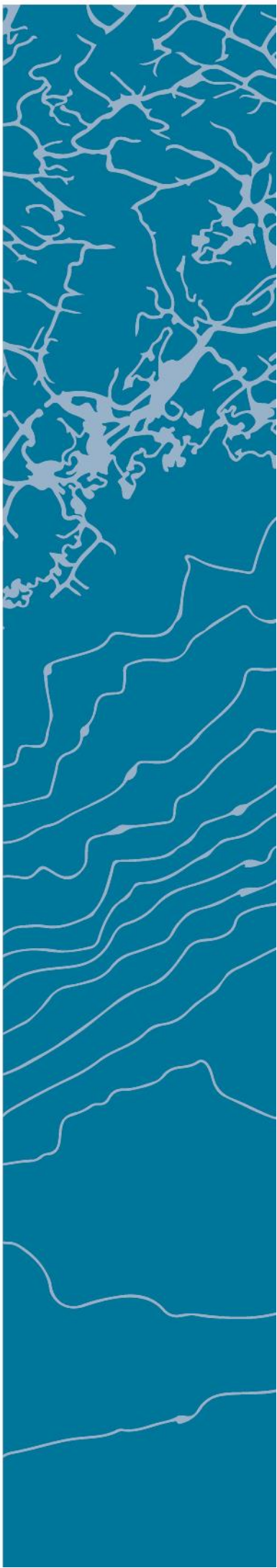
SUPERVISOR

Michael John Prince

University of Agder, 2019

Faculty of Humanities and Education

Department of English, Foreign Languages



FOREWORD:

First of all, I want to dedicate this thesis to my father, whom I wish could have been here to see me finish this challenging chapter of my life. I will always miss his encouraging words.

I also want to thank my supervisor Michael Prince, for always seeing the best in me. Thank you for your honesty, patience, and encouragement.

I want to thank my fellow master students and dear friends Corin, Sverre, and Kristine, for keeping me grounded with a weekly meet-up to talk about life and play *Magic: The Gathering*.

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Finally, thank you Anders, for your unending support and love, and for always being there. I know I haven't been the easiest person to live with the past year, so thank you for being patient.

At last, this road has come to an end. I'm lucky to be surrounded by such amazing people and they inspire me every single day to be the best version of me. It's true what The Beatles once said: you get by with a little help from your friends.

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old road is
Rapidly agin'.
Please get out of the new one
If you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'.

- Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A-Changin"

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0.0 An Introduction.

0.1 Introducing *Detroit: Become Human*.

You're in an elevator, going up. A coin dances between your fingertips, bouncing from one hand to the other, as if performing coin tricks was a predetermined program in your mind. The elevator pings and the door opens. You step out into the hallway of an apartment: a crime took place here. A fish is flapping for its life on the ground outside the aquarium. Do you save it by putting it back in the aquarium, where it belongs, or will you let it lie there to die? Does it matter to you? As you approach the living room, a crying woman is followed out by what looks like a member of the SWAT-team, and bumps into you, saying: "Please, you gotta save my little girl!" She touches your arms and looks you up and down, her eyes widening in desperation: "Wait… You're sending an android? You can't do that! Why aren't you sending a real person?"

In this opening scene of the neo-noir thriller game *Detroit: Become Human*, the player takes on the role of Connor, one of the three protagonists in the game, who is a detective android working for the Detroit City Police Department. Released in 2018 by the video game[1] company Quantic Dream, the story is set in an alternate near-future world of 2038, portraying a rejuvenated version of Detroit city where highly advanced androids have become a significant part of human's everyday lives. The citizens of Detroit are about to witness a shift in society, as the player is thrown into the beginning of Connor's storyline: they are challenged to solve a case where a rebellious android has murdered a man and has taken his child hostage.

Attributed to an 'error' in their programming, this incident catalyzes the general plotline in the game: originally designed to serve humans, androids are now beginning to display signs of becoming autonomous individuals. This leads to an attempt in establishing themselves as sentient beings, becoming so-called 'deviants.' For instance, whether Connor becomes deviant is decided by the player, who has to make choices for the protagonists that are outside their characteristic, pre-programmed design, leading to "software instabilities": a function that gradually increases their chance of becoming deviants (*Detroit: Become Human*).

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[1] This thesis will use the term 'video games' or 'games' as an umbrella term for console games and computer games, as they are rarely exclusive to one platform.

The game ultimately explores the integration of intelligent machine consciousness in human society, and explores the question of what it means to be human. When these machines turn into sentient beings, they echo human history as they grow into an individual 'race,' as they face the challenges met by various groups of people to be recognized as individuals. The game is separated into three main storylines, each with its own protagonist: *Connor*, the detective android previously described, who is assigned to work with the human detective Hank Anderson, an alcoholic man who despises androids. This creates an interesting dynamic in their relationship as they are ordered to track down and capture the deviants in Detroit together. The main element in this plotline is how Connor's increasing sign of deviancy is questioned throughout the game. In one instance, he meets his maker, Elijah Kamski, the creator of all androids. Kamski questions Connor's humanity by acknowledging the emerging conflict between humans and machines:

> Elijah Kamski: What about you, Connor? Whose side are you on?
>
> Connor: [optional answer] I'm on the humans' side, of course.
>
> Elijah Kamski: Well, that's what you're programmed to say. But you… what do you really want?

Being forced to choose sides reveals the Android revolution that is unfolding in *Detroit*. Will Connor remain the preconstructed android he was designed to be, or will he align himself with his fellow deviants? Another android who is challenged morally by her situation is the second protagonist *Kara*, who belongs to a man named Todd and his daughter Alice in the less fortunate part of Detroit. As a housekeeper android, she is designed to keep the house clean as well as taking care of Alice. Kara's deviancy is provoked as she witnesses Todd's physical abuse towards Alice, and together they escape the house. Throughout the rest of the game, Kara's pivot is to keep the child safe. Their narrative drives them through the dangerous corners of Detroit, in search of a safe place where they can live their lives in peace, evoking the question: can androids establish a mother-daughter relationship the same way humans do?

As a complete contrast to Kara's narrative, the third and final protagonist is *Markus*, a nurse android that belongs to a retired painter named Carl who resides in the wealthy part of Detroit. Carl is dependent on a wheelchair and needs Markus to manage his everyday life and to administer his medicine. However, one day Markus faces a confrontation with Carl's son Leo, a young man who lives off of his father's fortune to buy addictive drugs. This traumatic encounter turns Markus into a deviant, and he takes it upon himself to free other androids of

their 'slavery,' ultimately becoming the leader of an android revolution. Will it turn out to be a peaceful revolution, or will it be a violent battle for their rights?

These three characters are the only playable[2] avatars throughout the game, and the outcome of their storylines depends entirely on the player. The game is set in third-person with an over-the-shoulder perspective, providing a thought-provoking view of the world through the androids' eyes. In the visual palette of the game, what they experience can be understood as a social commentary on various attitudes toward femininity versus masculinity; how children evoke our humanity; and the struggles of social class. The goal of this thesis is to show how video games such as *Detroit* can be valuable as a socio-critical analysis, alongside other significant media such as film and literature.

Today, games are not generally recognized as socially valuable. However, narrative-heavy games such as *Detroit* bear heavy resemblance to another popular media, namely film. The game bears heavy resemblance to many works of science fiction, as they treat the same issues and have gained their acknowledgement because of this. Therefore, *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* become useful works for comparison and contrast in how games may have the same commentary function as films in socially impactful discussions. Even though there are definite similarities between film and games, it is essential to scrutinize how games as the emerging popular media carry innovative elements in terms of the relationship that the media creates with their players. Therefore, the discussions in this thesis have to be viewed from a film viewer versus game player perspective. The thesis will analyze the extratextual references in both *Detroit: Become Human* and the *Blade Runner* universe to consider how games can be used in a socio-critical analysis, showing how fiction reflects societal issues that are brought close to the audience's relatable life experiences. These references are, among many others, how machine consciousness is integrated into society, how social class reflects people's attitude toward the unknown, and how society questions what it means to be human.

Many believe that video games only have one purpose: to entertain. Like literature and film, games have become a different way of offering various interpretations of the world. Therefore, understanding media has become key to recognizing the dynamics of culture and society, as games have experienced increased interest in the twentieth century and has taken a more prominent role in people's daily life (Ryan and Thon 2). It is essential to acknowledge

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[2] 'Playable' refers to when something is suitable for play.

that the game in focus of this thesis, *Detroit: Become Human*, only represents a small fraction of the video game universe. Games are in the process of becoming a significant part of socio-critical discussions in contemporary society, and this thesis will attempt to capture one significant corner of the video game universe: that of the narrative-heavy game.

In chapter one, the thesis will introduce the theory and method by discussing the different relevant ludic, cinematic and literary theory often used in the respective research fields. Terms such as *immersion*, *flow*, and *experientiality* explain the psychological elements that connect the media to the audience. Consequently, story, and character are film theories useful for scrutinizing how *Detroit*: *Become Human*, and the *Blade Runner* universe offer a relevant critique of contemporary Western society. Thus, combining ludic and film theory is appropriate to showcase the importance of story and characters, and to understand their impact on the audience. In addition, certain literary theories will also prove useful in this discussion, such as transactional reader-response and Marxist criticism. These will be used in the two subsequent chapters where the environment in the fictional worlds is explored, and an analysis of relevant characters respectively.

In chapter two, the thesis will consider the environment in *Blade Runner 2049*, and the environmental storytelling in *Detroit: Become Human*, showing how the story can be fleshed out through elements in the environment, as additions to the fictional worlds that would not otherwise be expressed through dialogue. As such, environmental storytelling is an engaging element because the audience might ignore or fail to notice these elements, meaning that there are some parts of the story that might not be known if not being made aware of them. Unlike film, gameplay provide a deeper exploration of the milieu, giving the play better insight into the environment than film. Using the literary theory of transactional reader-response, this chapter will explore how the audience is given the freedom to interpret the fictional universe they are presented.

In chapter three, the thesis will provide an in-depth character analysis of the relevant personae from *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe, scrutinizing their importance in establishing a relationship with the audience. This analysis is essential to show how an immersive relationship between the audience and the media is established through the characters and the 'avatar': a character that represents the player. Through the notion of the avatar and their relation to the other characters, the player gains a unique feeling of agency, being able to embody a persona that they normally would not. While the avatar is usually

customizable by the player at the beginning of the game, *Detroit: Become Human* offers a new way of changing one's avatar: instead of changing their exterior, the player is challenged with changing their psychological interior – their emotions and their characteristics as individual beings. The characters represent the building blocks of narrative events, and "if those bodies in turn help to define the reader's position in relation to the text, then narrative is always necessarily concerned with its own hermeneutic conditions" (Punday 82). Furthermore, through the female characters, the chapter will provide a brief discussion on women in games, and how gender, in general, is portrayed in the respective works. Then, the chapter will move away from gender discussion and over to the significance of child characters, and how they can evoke emotion within the audience. Ultimately, human consciousness is questioned, and a paranoid conspiracy is conjured to support these two worlds' fundamental plotline: what if the machines around us could develop a consciousness? By creating a complicated relationship to technology, the audience's moral compass is challenged, and the two respective works choose to answer this question in an untraditional fashion.

Many scholars have considered whether video games are extensive subjects of study, and whether or not they are an appropriate subject for literary theory. However, what they have not done, is to move on from these specific discussions, and explore a specific game's ability to provide social commentary. Emphasizing certain aspects of game design, such as environmental storytelling, flow, and immersion, these elements will interpret how the game world relates to our own lived existence. To explore that, this thesis will primarily focus on the narrative aspect of games, such as dialogue, characterization, and the way these neo-noir stories are told through depictions of the environment. As Geoffrey Rockwell points out:

> The humanities should provide the literary theoretical structure to help others criticize them for what they are, not what they do to us. If the academic community is unwilling to discuss what would make a good game, how can we bemoan the lack of quality of what is out there? (351).

So far, the scarce research that has been done on video games have only displayed one side of the media. Due to an adolescent audience, the violent and sexist characters, and "the general failure of traditional disciplines to deal with games of any sort as a form of human expression worthy of study," there seems to be none yet who has decided that games are worth studying (Rockwell 345). What makes video games such a fascinating media is that

they are not only used for artistic expression, but they have also developed a cultural significance through implementing societal elements that appeal to a larger group of players:

> As the [video game] industry has matured economically, so too has its content – gaming is no longer the exclusive domain of children […] As the industry has expanded in size and economic importance, it has also become a vital and powerful artifact of culture. With improved technology and new markets to satisfy, video games offer more realistic experiences than ever before (Orr 39).

0.2 Introducing the *Blade Runner* universe and the World of Film.

Digital storytelling in the form of film and video games has become a prominent way of investigating various contemporary socio-critical discussions: "Much of how we think about narrative depends on a particular set of ideas about human potential and identity" (Punday 53). *Detroit: Become Human* 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. These elements remind us of influential works of science fiction inspired by Philip K. Dick: his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* from 1968; the 1981 film by Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner*, based upon the novel; and a recent film, *Blade Runner 2049*, the sequel inspired by Dick's works.

Blade Runner was an influential work of science fiction: Set in 2019 in the city of Los Angeles, the central plotline revolves around the blade runner Rick Deckard chasing down rebellious replicants while having his humanity questioned. They explore the romantic relationship between Deckard and the replicant Rachael, blurring the boundaries between human and machine, as well as exploring the challenges and dilemmas the characters face when the definition of human is no longer fixed. At the end of the most popular version of the movie, as he and Rachael drive away from Los Angeles, Deckard contemplates: "Tyrell had told me Rachael was special. No termination date. I didn't know how long we had together. Who does?" (*Blade Runner*, Scott).

This closing line became an open invitation for the developers of *Blade Runner 2049* to imply that Tyrell knew something about Rachael that nobody else did: that she had the potential of becoming a mother. Reproduction is, therefore, one of the critical points in the plotline of *Blade Runner 2049*, which emerged thirty-five years after its predecessor. Following the 'impossible' romance from the previous *Blade Runner*, it turns out that Rachael

and Deckard had a child together, where Rachael died in childbirth. The child remains alive, and the protagonist K is ordered by human authority to find it and "take care of it," reflecting the humans' fear of machines being able to reproduce (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve). Like Deckard, K works as a blade runner for the Los Angeles Police Department – the only difference being that K himself is a replicant.[3] Having a holographic lover named Joi, K's artificial relationship opens a debate about whether androids can be in a romantic relationship with each other. This debate is drawn even further from the first *Blade Runner* film and the novel when the question was whether or not a human can be in a relationship with a machine. Furthermore, K defies his orders to execute the child and chooses instead to protect it, demonstrating how replicants does not only have an artificial side, but also a 'human' side.

In a fictional world with increased automation, robotics and bioengineering, it seems that technology have developed a sense of 'humanity,' echoing Tyrell's motto 'more human than humans' – which "have long been the staple of fantasy and science fiction movies" (William 388). This line is repeated in *Blade Runner 2049* when K is confronted by a group of replicants that are planning a rebellion against the humans. They are willing to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their revolution, believing they are doing a deed much greater than anything any human has ever done. The foundation of the plotlines in *Detroit: Become Human* and the *Blade Runner* universe explores the relationship between humans and machines, where they are, at first, represented as killers. However, the respective fictional works also aim to prove that replicants can be redeemers of humankind as, in the end, they seem to value life more than humans do (Arostegui 35).

Furthermore, the miraculous event of a replicant giving birth to a child seems to be looked upon with horror by humans because it emphasizes their fear of being replaced on this earth. In other words, to escape the prevailing conceptions about androids, these events attempt to prove they are worthy of gaining the status as a human. Film and video games share the way they elicit emotion in the audience, leading to establishing a relationship between the media and the agent: "many scholars have elaborated models to explain how emotions are elicited in video games, most fruitfully with recourse to cognitive film theory" (Eichner 175). To make a leaner comparison and contrast between the two contemporary

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[3] It should be noted that there have been speculations from the original film that Deckard is a replicant. However, since he has considerably aged from the first film to *2049*, and there is no indication that replicants age the way humans do, this thesis is written with the belief that Deckard is a human being.

narratives, the focus of this thesis will be on *Detroit* and *Blade Runner 2049*, with brief discussions of *Blade Runner* where it is considered relevant. This thesis' focus will be how these two different fictional universes portray advanced technology such as androids, as well as compare and contrast their value of humanity, how they discuss real-life issues such as environment, feminism, commodification, and social class.

To emphasize how games have become an essential part of contemporary culture, one has to look at other vital media such as film and literature. Comparing and contrasting film media with video game media can provide valuable insight into how they can equally be used as a reflection of society. By evoking the 'Frankensteinian' notion where a creature made out of non-organic matter can possess emotions and individual thoughts, the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit* question the social position of androids and autonomous machine consciousness, while they also rebel against traditional perceptions of gender, race, and class. Contrariwise, the respective works challenge the audience's expectations by presenting androids who possess a full range of 'human' emotions in a world where humans are robot-like and emotionless in behavior (Williams 388). Ultimately, the question 'what makes us human?' is an essential part of these two worlds, and becomes a gateway for connecting the viewer and the player into the stories.

0.3 The Current Cultural Significance of Games.

Considering the enormous range of games available today, capturing the essence of narrative-heavy games in merely one thesis is not possible. Current video game research is more concerned with the design aspect of video games, exploring the technical elements behind graphically advanced games. The content of games in recent years has been more carefully weighed, often with a specific goal in mind, which is to convey profound messages. As the game industry has reached this new milestone, researchers need to consider the social impact of games (Konzack 44).

To further emphasize the growing impact video games have on the world, the Chinese game market[4] contains nearly 560 million gamers, making it the number one country worldwide in terms of game revenues (newzoo.com). The United States game market comes

[4] Chinese Games Market in 2016: https://newzoo.com/insights/infographics/chinese-games-market-2016/

in second, with 160 million gamers[5] – which equals 61 percent of the online population. Even though there is an enormous number of gamers worldwide, there is still a conservative attitude towards games and computer technology. Even though many rely on the technology that the computer provides, "many of us still see the machine as a threat rather than an ally. We cling to books as if we believed that coherent human thought is only possible on bound, numbered pages" (Murray 8 [1997]). However, the computer could potentially be a powerful vehicle for literary creation if its attributes were identified and exploited (71).

Far from all games are narrative focused, or contain a narrative element at all – such as the tile-matching puzzle *Bejeweled* or the action shooter *Critical Annihilation*. They are ultimately a form of entertainment that has, alongside films, become used increasingly as a media for conveying narratives. More research needs to be done on the narrative aspect of particular games, and how literary theories can be applied to a specific type of games. They have become

> an interactive medium, an art form that exists not to be observed, but to be experienced. Players derive challenge, enjoyment, meaning, and even beauty from within the games that they play, triggering highly personal experiences. The unique intensity of these experiences has captured the hearts, minds, and passions of generations (Nacke et al. 105).

In recent years, the game industry has opened their eyes to more narrative-heavy games as a socio-critical influence on the player. Examples range from the indie horror game *Detention*, which is set in Taiwan in the 1960s, a period called the White Terror, constituting civil suppression and political unrest under the Nationalist Chinese government (Oh), to interpreting taboo topics such as sexual identity, mental health, and adapting to society such as the game *Life Is Strange*. As will be shown in *Detroit: Become Human*, the game explores several real-life issues, and ultimately offers an interpretation of what it means to be human.

Storytelling has always been a part of human nature and presents a vital component of how experiences are communicated. With an increasing desire to experience extraordinary realities and live someone else's lives, people strived to find new and innovative ways in which a person could experience a fictional universe. Technology introduced new ways of telling stories, and the classical reader was challenged by the introduction of television and cinema, which introduced auditory and visual components to the storytelling experience (Lotz

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[5] The American Gamer in 2017 https://newzoo.com/insights/infographics/the-american-gamer-2017/

50). Similar to television, film had its impact on culture and constituted one of the most influential media because politically relevant meanings are shaped there, providing a useful interpretation of various social, cultural, and political practices (Williams 383). In the 1980s and 90s, a new form of digital media emerged. The introduction of the 'hypertext'[6] contributed to a wide range of possibilities for 'interactive storytelling' as a contemporary form of narrative in digital media, which led to year one of game studies, inaugurating a new discipline by Espen Aarseth in 2001 (Neitzel 2-3). Therefore, this thesis will discuss specific events taking place in the game world and interpreting that as it relates to our own lived existence by focusing on the narrative aspect of games such as dialogue, character, and the way stories are told through depictions of the environment.

0.4 The Narrative Architecture of *Detroit: Become Human*.

Detroit: Become Human creates a story where the player is given an unusually high degree of control of the narrative context. It brings the player into the conversation as an essential part of the story's outcome, controlling the protagonists' actions and reactions. The plotline is separated into what can be defined as 'chapters,' where the player follows each of the protagonists' storylines. At the end of each chapter, a *flowchart* appears, a tree-structured display of the complex, non-linear narrative. Each flowchart 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: "The entire game is built on the idea that the player is the co-writer of the experience and that he will tell his own story through his actions so they can have a significant impact on the story and on the world itself" ("David Cage on Detroit – Quantic Dream's New PS4 Exclusive"). Throughout *Detroit*, the player is engaged in conversations the protagonists encounter, deciding what they are going to say, and how the conversation will turn out – emotionally shaping their character as well as the storyline. Through these design principles, "players are made to experience a diverse and vivid range of emotions including joy, excitement, and even fear (Nacke et al., 105).

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[6]"Hypertext is often understood as a medium of text, as an alternative to (among others) the codex format found in books, magazines, and bound manuscripts. It is often defined as a mechanical (computerized) system of reading and writing, in which the text is organized into a network of fragments and the connections between them" (Aarseth 76).

Since the player is allowed to design their own story, each game experience is unique. Where the script for a film consists of approximately three hundred to four hundred pages, the script for Detroit consists of approximately four to five thousand pages. This is because the game developers needed to tell all the possible stories within this specific narrative space, with around one thousand different possible scenarios.[7] The developers of the game stated that instead of offering the traditional *world exploration*, they offer *narrative exploration* ("An Interactive Story"). As such, narrative exploration has become an essential aspect of certain games, meaning that the story is in focus rather than technical gameplay. Often described as 'playing a movie,' narrative-heavy games do not contain advanced and challenging gameplay, but instead offers the player an in-depth exploration of a story, with a detailed plotline. The player can create their version of the story with branching dialogue and intricate character design, which will be explored more closely in the analysis of *Detroit: Become Human*. However, in the end, a video game will always to a certain extent be bound by rules, a digitalized program consciously designed with specific boundaries, giving the player certain restraints in the game world. In order to proceed in the narrative and make progress in the game, the player is required to complete specific tasks – every interaction is a meaningful engagement with the narrative and helps shape the player experience.

"Game design should no longer just involve the question of how to create immersive experiences, but instead ask how to express and present philosophical ideas in a game system" (Konzack 33). Game developers often design games to spark the socio-political and socio-critical debates, and design their products to be "interactive, aesthetically expressive experiences of emergent philosophical systems" (36). Consequently, games are increasingly used as a medium of expression and might result in the player being more actively engaged in society, taking moral standpoints in socio-critical discussions. Video games have developed a cultural significance, and the role of the player has been an increasingly important factor of game design, by implementing significant psychological value for the player. Comparably, one of the common factors that literature, film, and video games share, is how they establish a relationship with their audience. Through an analysis of relevant characters, this thesis will

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[7] Note: It is important to remember that because this is a game with a branching story, each quote taken from the game only be *one specific way* of dealing with the dialogue. There are many possible outcomes to each dialogue, and the quotes I will discuss here in the thesis will only be a fraction of what is possible for the player to encounter during their playthrough.

argue that one of the main ways of establishing a relationship with the audience is through human emotion. Entertainment media often use primary emotions like fear, aggression, or joy in order to engage the viewers' emotional experience of what is happening on the screen: When used in film, such means are used to alter the viewers' imagination and affective participation of the narrative events.

Psychological elements such as 'immersiveness' and flow are fundamental for establishing a relationship to the audience, making it desirable to stay in the fictional world for a longer period of time. By engaging in narrative elements in contemporary media, these psychological aspects will evidently lead to the audience losing track of time. Through emotion, humans can relate their experiences both to the fictional world as well as the characters within it. Games are excellent media for conveying experiences and stories, and reach out to the player by including psychological elements that make them feel involved in a game world. However, games are different from film and literature in one fundamental way: its interactivity. Though not interactive, film and literature are to some degree able to reach out to their audience with an intriguing story that challenges socio-critical discussion. In comparison, film and literature is a more passive media, where the story is presented without any form of active engagement from the audience. Orr states that:

> when we think about films, we consider the whole cinematic experience: sitting next to strangers, the projection, and the smell of buttered popcorn affects our experience. For video games, we must also consider the entire impact of the surrounding environment, and how the individual relates with the medium (Orr 44).

In contrast to film, the emotional impact on players' experience in video games is arguably more profound. The player does not only imaginatively participate in the characters' emotional behavior, but they transfer "paradigmatic affective knowledge into motor actions and movements" (Fahlenbrach 145). In other words, a player will assign their own experiences to their avatar and will, through this effect, become more immersed into the game world, as the character virtually becomes a copy of themselves.

0.5 Chapter Overview.

The first chapter will introduce the reader to the 'rules' of ludic, cinematic, and literary theory. The second and third chapter will analyze the environment and the characters respectively. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to prove that a game can be equally valued to

film and literature, and that the increasing significance of games can be viewed to be an essential part of socio-critical discussions. Games are not only a viable research field in itself, but also an interdisciplinary addition to literary and film studies. As a source for comparison and contrast, *Blade Runner 2049* provides an engaging insight into a new way of researching games, such as how characters can be analyzed within a certain genre, and how games and film use different ways of reaching out to the audience and the players. Due to limited space and the vastness of the relevant elements that would need to be discussed, this thesis has chosen to limit the use of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and its adaptation *Blade Runner*. However, certain aspects of the discussions will use the term '*Blade Runner* universe' as a denominator for the respective cultural productions, and will be used to show how film treats androids as opposed to how games treat androids, such as reflecting various social issues such as class struggle and economic exploitation.

To introduce the ludic theories, Katherine Isbister's *Emotion by Design – How Games Move Us* explains various psychological elements that ultimately contribute to a player's experience within a game. Jamie Madigan's *Getting Gamers – The Psychology of Video Games and Their Impact on the People Who Play Them* views games from a psychological perspective and explores the appeal of games. Similarly, Bernard Perron and Felix Schröter's collection of essays in *Video Games and the Mind: Essays on Cognition, Affect and Emotion* will also prove useful in talking about the different psychological aspects of embodiment in games, such as Felix Schröter's "My Avatar and Me: Toward a Cognitive Theory of Video Game Characters" provides insight into the importance of the avatar; Lennart E. Nacke et al.'s "Games of the Heart and Mind: Affective Ludology and the Development of Emotionally Aware Player Experiences" renders how emotion can be connected to a player's game experience; and Susanne Eichner's "Representing Childhood, Triggering Emotions: Child Characters in Video Games" which provides fascinating insight into the relevance of child characters in video games, which this can also be applied to film, where the introduction of children can assist in establishing an emotional connection to the audience.

Following the introduction of the ludic theories, cinematic terms will be presented using Jakob Lothe's *Narrative in Fiction and Film*. Characterization and story are cinematic terms analogous to ludic concepts and becomes useful in exploring the similarities between film narratives and game narratives. Continually, there are also relevant literary theories that a film and a game can be explored through, such as Louise Rosenblatt's "Writing and Reading:

The Transactional Theory" which will be used to show how transactional reader-response theory can be compared to the relationship between contemporary media and the audience. These engagements are similarly produced in games and film, and reader-response theory reflects how contemporary media are able to carry social relevance through literary themes.

Considering that *Blade Runner 2049* alongside *Detroit* lacks academic research, some research done on the original *Blade Runner* can, however, be used in the discussions that compare and contrast the two fictional universes. As such, Kevin McNamara's "Blade Runner's Post-Individual Worldspace," María del Mar Asensio Aróstegui's "Self-Consciousness and Intertextuality in Ridley Scott's 'Blade Runner'," and William Fisher's "Of Living Machines and Living-Machines: Blade Runner and the Terminal Genre" are useful for exploring both characters and environment in the *Blade Runner* universe. However, by using theories from well-established research fields such as film and literature, I will explore how they can be analyzed alongside each other in a socio-critical context.

1.0 Theory and Method: A Discussion of Ludic, Cinematic, and Literary Theories.

Gradually becoming a form of artistic expression, video games have consequently developed a cultural significance. As Johan Huizinga once expressed: "It is through playing that society expresses its interpretation of life and the world" (46). To understand how a video game can, alongside film and literature, be analyzed in sociological, cultural, and political settings, one needs an introduction to relevant psychological elements behind game design. How are games able to establish a profound relationship with the player? In what way have they become equal to other socially significant media such as film? Even though they are most often isolated within their respective disciplines, one cannot ignore the fact that ludic, cinematic, and literary theories carry a certain connection, such as setting, character and plot elements. Ludic theories such as *immersion* and *flow* will show that games can incorporate a player into a fictional universe, and that these psychological elements make the player able to stay in the fictional world for an extended amount of time. Concurrently, cinematic theories such as *characterization* and *narration* will explore how a fictional world is built. Finally, selected critical theories used in literature will be explored, namely Transactional Reader Response, Cultural Criticism and Marxist Criticism, which all provide a traditional way of analyzing literature that can be equally relevant to film and games.

1.1 Genre.

In order to understand the contents of the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit: Become Human*, one has to understand their genre, which is defined as a "neo-noir thriller" ("David Cage on Detroit – Quantic Dream's New PS4 Exclusive"). Jerold J. Abrams discusses the genre in *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir* and explains that "everything takes place in relation to the self: the self is the detective, the self is the villain, and all the cues exist solely within his own mind" (Abrams 9). He renders the experience of neo-noir to contain elements of the classic noir genre, such as detectives, labyrinths, and femme fatales. In this case, neo-noir was the "perfectly natural extension of the same old classic themes," and takes place neither in the distant past nor the distant future (8, 16). This is the case with both works that this thesis studies: *Detroit* takes place in 2038, and the first *Blade Runner* takes place in 2019, and the second film in 2049. In addition, these works have in common the way they preserve the

classic noir and its focus on the human condition: "we can never escape it, and the detective knows it; there's no way out of the maze of the noir city" (Abrams 19).

Being inspired by history and previous work is a term called 'pastiche,' meaning work composed from elements borrowed from preexisting creations. The frequent use of pastiche has been turned into a characteristic feature of postmodernism, which applies to both the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit: Become Human* ("Pastiche"). *Blade Runner* is a pastiche of previous films and a blending of cinematic genres such as science fiction and *film noir*, with intertextual references that can be explained as "the result of a nostalgic longing for the past" (Arostegui 30). As such, there are four typical characteristics of *film noir* in the *Blade Runner* universe: the investigator, the doppelgänger, a corrupt authority and the *femme fatale*" (34). All of these factors can be found in *Detroit* as well, with Connor and Hank's detective case, the doppelgänger in the form of the reproduction of the same androids, and the society's corrupt authority.

The notion of the femme fatale begun as a sexual seductress of Hollywood cinema as a symbol for the undercurrents of sexual, social and ideological unrest (Boozer 20). This type of female character was created to have a destabilizing effect on film narratives: some portrayed the femme fatale as non-violent and/or supportive of the protagonist. Others chose to portray her as a "lethal seductress, a figure which largely abjures traditional romance and passive domesticity, choosing instead to apply her sexuality to homicidal plots in the service of greed" (Boozer 20). *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe portray both versions of this female character, in the form of Chloe and Luv, both being assistants of their respective creators Kamski and Wallace – a discussion that will be returned to in the chapter on character analysis.

As such, the *Blade Runner* universe carries defined science fiction characteristics, which deals principally with "the impact of actual or imagined science on society or individuals or having a scientific factor as an essential orienting component" ("Science Fiction"). Early science fiction and technology was associated with modernity, rapid change as well as alternation of traditional social institutions and structures (Campbell and Kean 292), which is vividly reflected in the *Blade Runner* universe: With visual motifs such as flying vehicles, a futuristic cityscape, advanced technology alongside androids "despite the parallelism they establish with the myth of Frankenstein" (Aróstegui 31).

Comparably, *Detroit* attempts to create a near-present depiction of their universe, yet still contains science fiction elements such as creating an imagined society where technological science has prospered. The genre has persistently been a way of expressing America's response to media and technology, "providing an arena removed from the political sphere in which issues of identity, power, machine culture and apocalypse could be examined through narrative exploration" (Campbell and Kean 292). The game offers a universe designed to provoke, intrigue, and engage people in discussing futuristic yet topical issues such as artificial intelligence and the development in society and the change in attitude in society that follows such a complicated development.

To emphasize the genre of science fiction and neo-noir, *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe also carries extraordinary soundscapes. Nacke explains that the effects of environmental stimuli such as game sound and music have the potential to act as a mitigating factor of the player's affective response, and music served to intensify its effects (109). The sound is essential to reinforcing immersion, providing players with realistic cues that effectively extend their presence in the game world. Certain sound qualities can be used to evoke particular emotions from the player such as "feelings of accomplishment, frustration, tension, or fear. Consequently, we are presented with the possibility of designing systems which leverage dynamic audio responses to change, encourage, or adapt to a player's emotional state" (111). *Detroit*'s detailed application of sound and music is used as a minor emphasis on the protagonists' personalities. As a characteristic of the science fiction and neo-noir genre, the "distinct musical colors fitting out main characters' identities and sustain their individual arc" (Foundaumière), and the music becomes a part of the characterization as well as the environment:

> To stress Connor's very cold and mechanical behavior, we chose a primarily electronic soundtrack. For Kara, we wanted music that would be emotional and moving, underlining her quest for identity, love and empathy. For Markus, we needed a soundtrack that would be epic and represent the grand aspect of this journey (Fondaumière).

However, audio is not only crucial in video games – it is essential in film, too. In the *Blade Runner* universe, the ambiance is a present element, contributing to the audience's feeling of being embodied in a science fiction universe. Similarly, *Blade Runner*'s music is an essential component of the film's scenery, as it

> lends itself to this generic effect of effacing the nature-culture opposition […] its soothing electronic sonorities becoming a very part of the hypnotic, inescapable background noise of public spaces like elevators and cafes as well as the beeping and squelching gadget-ridden homes and apartments (Fisher 191).

In science fiction, advanced technology is often portrayed as being in dialogue with humans rather than a threat or controlling force. As such, media technology offers a transformative opportunity to situate humans and technology as coextensive and mutually defining "instead of oppressive, conditioning and reductive" (Campbell and Kean 289). The way autonomous machine consciousness is problematized is one of the most critical issues the world of *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe face as a society.

Furthermore, *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe are both infused with cyberpunk elements, each with their vision of automated depleted human agency (Melley 44). The genre acknowledges the inevitability of media technologies, carrying an open approach to machines: Showing the dark side as well as "the opportunities it might contain for a redefinition of the human" (Campbell and Kean 282, 288). Cyberpunk's founding presumption is that the human body can be colonized and made into a hybrid of organic and technological elements, always exposed to corporations that supply its prosthetically extended modes of being (Melley 189).

> Cyberpunk's reinvention of the American frontier is part of a *mythic* recuperation of the unconditioned and uncontrolled subject, a fantasy of liberation that has historically functioned in the service of imperialism and that critics have rightly linked to masculine self-making (Melley 194).

Viewed as the dark side of technology, androids are deemed a potential threat to the fabric of society: "As non-human, technology is always likely to go out of control, to destroy and to impose itself on emotive and compassionate humanity" (Campbell and Kean 292). However, *Detroit* steps away from the traditional definition of science fiction and challenges the utopian aspect of technology. In the game, Detroit has experienced an industrial rebirth, and humans' life has been made easier with the help of advanced androids that look, speak, and act like human beings. Upon designing the plot of the game, writer David Cage posed the question "what if the androids were the good guys, and the humans were the bad guys?" ("Detroit: Become Human - E3 2016 LiveCast | PS4"), similar to Melley's interpretation of *Blade Runner*'s replicants: even though they are constructs, the film nevertheless demonstrates sympathy for its replicants. Indistinguishable from 'real humans,' the replicants display resistance to social programming and demand for human rights (190). Looking

beyond game design, *Detroit* explores both historical events as well as present social discussions on a scale that can be compared alongside film and literature.

1.2 Immersion, Emotion, and Flow.

> When I get engrossed in a story, all the little nagging things that get in my head get reduced to background noise, and for the length of the playtime I'm able to calm down. My legs stop shaking, my headache goes away. For a couple of hours, I'm at peace ("The Philosophy of Torment: Tides of Numenera").

This is a player's description of a phenomenon called *immersion*: a psychological element that explains how humans can mentally 'detach' from their sense of self. This allows the player to briefly forget that the game world they are experiencing is fictional and temporary: "in a participatory medium, immersion implies learning to swim, to do the things that the new environment makes possible" (Murray 125 [2017]). Immersion changes the sensorial information that is sent to the brain: with the help of visual and audio information and haptic feedback,[8] it is described as "the feeling of total embodiment in a fictional world" (Madigan 120). The purpose of creating an immersive environment is to construct a psychological 'magnet' for the player that persuades them to be an active and engaged part of the story and the fictional world (Murray 126 [1997]). Being in a state of immersion is described by Murray as a metaphor for water submersion:

> The sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality […] that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus. We enjoy the movement out of our familiar world, the feeling of alertness that comes from being in this new place, and the delight that comes from learning to move within it. Immersion can entail a mere flooding of the mind with sensation (Murray 125 [2017]).

A perfect state of immersion is the ideal and desirable condition for the player, yet impossible to achieve in current game engines. However, game developers still strive to attain this in their games. A human being's desire to experience immersion causes them to focus their attention on the fictional world and use their intelligence to reinforce rather than to question the experience (Murray 110 [1997]). A person's state of immersion is fragile, and there is no guarantee that the player will feel immersed the entire duration of the game.

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[8] Such as the vibrations and rumbles from a video game controller (Blenkinsopp).

Before video games became popular, psychologists were studying how media consumers were being pulled into imaginary worlds created by books, radio, television, and movies (Madigan 120). Fahlenbrach comments on how audiovisual entertainment such as film and games make use of 'emotion metaphors,' to generate affective responses in the film viewer and the game player (145, 147). These are also used to communicate the inner feelings of characters, and are used to enhance emotions shown on the screen by interpreting invisible aspects of the emotional states in pictures, sound, and movements. Such emotion metaphors are not only used as an emphatic engagement with the characters, but also to intensify the recipients' affective and emotional reaction. Film uses emotion metaphors to "lend nuance to the representation of what the situation means to a person or character" (147, 148). In video games, emotion metaphors are used to create "affectively laden scenarios, aiming to inform players about the fictional emotions of characters" (148). In addition to developing and implementing audio and visual techniques to appeal to the player, the use of Motion Capture has been used progressively to convey emotions. "Motion capture,"[9] also defined under the name "performance capture," is

> a means of recording an actor's movements and/or facial expressions so that they can be mapped onto a computer-generated character. An actor performs in the role of the character while wearing a leotard covered in motion detecting sensors ("Motion Capture").

This is a useful tool for game developers and filmmakers alike to include realism in their creations, and *Detroit: Become Human* and *Blade Runner 2049* is made with this technology. For the game, real-live actors filmed each scene in order for the game designers to create a realistic, animated version of them. Sensory information is integrated through a 'body schema,' where a person's body shapes their perceptual field in moving through an environment and offers information about our posture and movement (Kukkonen 52). This way, the characters' facial expressions and body movements would seem more real, and thus more relatable. This realistic rendering of the characters challenges the audiences' reaction upon encountering a machine consciousness that looks identical to a human. Furthermore, Cage expressed how technology was not only used to improve the graphics in *Detroit* but also

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[9] In the award-winning game *The Last of Us*, one of the elements it was praised for was the acting and voice acting. For a visual explanation, here is a video where motion capture and the final product is lined up simultaneously: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_mjLSzW13g

to improve the emotion the player would experience. With better facial animation, better lighting, and larger environments "with a lot of life and passers-byers and things happening wherever you look around," the game would offer a realistic interpretation of the world ("David Cage on Detroit – Quantic Dream's New PS4 Exclusive").

There are different degrees of Motion Capture, such as capturing only the body motion and precise body movements, to capturing every detail of the actor's body including their facial movements. Not being bound by physicality, Motion Capture is used to bring certain characters to life, animating stories in a way previously impossible. It is an interesting contribution to film and video games as it rattles the audiences' perception of what is real. In *Blade Runner 2049*, there is one particular scene where this technology was used. To satisfy his curiosity on the anatomy of replicants, Niander Wallace captures Rick Deckard to interrogate him on how a replicant child can be biologically possible. By provoking Deckard's emotions, Wallace presents his recreation of the deceased Rachael. Since the actor who played Rachael had aged, yet her character has not, the filmmakers had to include Motion Capture to recreate the replicant realistically. In other words, a different actor would mimic Rachael's movement, so that the film makers could revive the character the best possible way. This has been a significant design element in the creation of these worlds: since the androids in *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe are portrayed as human, the assistance of Motion Capture made their appearance more relatable.

Emotions are one of the fundamental elements that define human beings, and the unpredictability and the dynamics of a person's emotions is one of the things that make them difficult to understand. Marco Caracciolo defines emotion as "a precognitive evaluation of a situation. Stories can trigger emotional reactions by bringing into play values and evaluations that are part of the receivers' […] background" (236). In games, the emotional experience becomes an integral part of the play experience (Järvinen 94, 96). Including higher cognitive and cultural associations in a contemporary video game will contribute to a more sophisticated emotional design (155). This has been a gateway for the game developers to create games that connect to the player through experience and emotion. In this instance, *Detroit: Become Human*'s focus on emotional exchange might be one of the more fascinating elements in the game. Before turning deviant, the androids express feelings through what can be described as an 'emotion tracker,' which is located at the right temple of each android. These devices display three different colors that each represent a different state of mind. Blue

means neutral, yellow means that they are processing information, thinking or reacting to what is happening before them, and red means that they sense a threat, or that they are being threatened.

After their deviancy unfolds, they remove the tracker: removing any technological indication of their emotions. The humans, the player included, can no longer tell what they are feeling at every point in time, making it more realistically relatable to a human being. The emotional metaphors offer the player a way to identify the emotional motivations, inner states, and moods of a character (Fahlenbrach 155). Researchers in neuropsychology have discovered that interacting with a game shifts the emotional patterns observed in the players' brains, demonstrating how human beings experience particular rewards and emotions from the act of playing (Isbister 3). Therefore, the psychological elements of game design are essential to understanding the possibility of establishing a unique relationship between the player and the game. To briefly experience the reality of someone else seems to be an effective way of gaining an understanding of different life experiences (Caracciolo 236). Through temporarily adopting characters' perspectives, the person can alter – and perhaps even widen – their outlook of the world, which is the goal of both fictional universes that lie under the scope of this thesis. Through the eyes of the android protagonists of *Detroit* and *Blade Runner 2049*, the audience is challenged to look upon the history of humanity as well as the future, to reflect on the choices made in the past, so they can reconsider the choices to be made tomorrow.

Through experience, auditive and visual clues, the audience might enter an additional psychological state called *Flow*. In basic terms, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of Flow explores how a human being can reach the perfect state of happiness through *optimal experience*: "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (4). Such optimal experiences occur "when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits" to accomplish something challenging (3). This gives a sense of mastery, or "a sense of *participation* in determining the content of life – that comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness" (4). Several factors are considered necessary when describing the feeling of Flow, some of which is a complete involvement in a person's activity, knowing that the activity is achievable, timelessness, and intrinsic motivation.

The elements that explain the Flow theory carries strong similarities to the psychological state of immersion. As some of the fundamental building blocks of emotional design in video

games, a person who experiences Flow while playing a game might feel that "time seems to melt away and personal problems disappear" (Isbister 4). Having Flow in active media such as games offers a more nuanced emotional palette to the game design. This interactivity determines the significant difference between passive media like literature and film. Watching a movie like *Blade Runner 2049,* the audience might experience Flow because of how the story is narrated, by combining relatable elements from reality, but also to challenge the audience's imagination of what could be a prediction of the future.

Chen explores Csikszentmihalyi's theory to understand why people have fun with games and believes the Flow theory encourages game designers to keep players in a fragile state. Too little ability in gameplay can result in anxiety and frustration; too little challenge might result in boredom or apathy (5). In other words, the player is more susceptible to a state of Flow when the game matches the skill of the player and differs in intensity for the experienced gamer than the novice. Flow gives the player a sense of accomplishment: they feel 'empowered' – in control during the actual gameplay. The psychological element is useful for understanding the unique emotional power of games compared to other media (Isbister 5). Most often, a game's goal is to maintain Flow throughout the game, yet it can be broken both through narrative and gameplay design such as incohesive storylines, poor voice acting, erratic dialogue, and other inconsistencies in the game world.

1.3 Film and Literature.

In the field of ludology, video game scholars have been hesitant to acknowledge the connection between game design and storytelling. Their denial has failed to bring light to the larger picture, which is how games can take part in important socio-critical discussions. As pointed out by Konzack:

> If game culture and aesthetics are to develop into mature games beyond teenage power-gaming and simplistic propaganda, designers will have to meet this challenge and create games that expect the players to explore and reflect on game experiences (42).

If games are on the verge of becoming a meaningful part of contemporary culture, the game experiences have to deliver an emotional and experiential impact on the player. In this part of the chapter, ludic and literary-cinematic narrative perspectives will be used as a foundation for comparison and contrast analysis between a film and the game. In order to do

this, Jakob Lothe's theories become useful as he is a passionate advocate for considering film as a variant of narrative communication. Narratives are considered not only as different forms of cultural expression but also our "patterns of experience into our own lives" (3). Alongside psychological aspects such as *immersion* and *Flow*, the general narrative aspect is crucial to its functions and effects on the audience. Lothe presents the fundamental aspects of narrative fiction as *story*, which refers to the narrated events and conflict in narrative fiction, which are arranged together with fictional characters (6). These structures of narrative fiction can also be found in *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe. Like literature, both film and games require a written manuscript, where the story begins before realized on screen. As mentioned earlier, the story designers of *Detroit* had to produce several thousand pages of a written story before the game could be realized. While the writing did not go as far in the production of *Blade Runner 2049*, on the other hand, they still had to produce a manuscript before the actors could play the scene. These examples alone make it difficult to agree with scholars who deny the narrative content of these popular media.

Furthermore, Lothe introduces elements of characterization such as *speech*, what the characters say or think has a defining function through content and form; *external appearance and behavior* as interpreted by the narrator, or another character; and finally, *milieu*, which is how surroundings may variously contribute to the indirect presentation of a character (83-84). A character is defined as "a personage in a 'narrative or dramatic work,' a character briefly describes some recognizable type of person" ('Character,' Dictionary of Literary Terms). This definition describes someone the audience can relate to, an authentic human element that creates a direct link between the real and the fictional world. Lothe discusses the *mimetic* component, which is linked to "the identifying activity we perform as readers when we switch from registering a fictional character to perceiving them as acting and thinking" (78). The *thematic* component, on the other hand, is related to what is important and intriguing about a character, and to what extent they represent a relationship between an archetype and one's individuality. Is a character credible, and how do they change? (78).

Even though the main characters in *Detroit* and *Blade Runner 2049* are androids, they still elicit every emotion a human character would have, and perhaps even more so. They represent a whole new race that strives to become acknowledged as individual beings. To avoid interpreting the various "specifying and differentiating features that characterize and distinguish the characters from one another," Lothe argues that a character needs to be

analyzed from both a mimetic and thematic component (79). These factors are useful for exploring character, progression, and plot as the components connect to the identifying of a character and making them relatable to the audience.

In addition to Lothe's cinematic theories, film has been looked at through literary theories such as the *transactional reader-response theory*. In transactional reader-response, "the literary work is a product of the transaction between text and reader, both of which are equally important to the process" (Tyson 165). Believing that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature, reader-response theorists argue that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by a literary text. Instead, they actively make the meaning they find in literature, suggesting that different readers may read the same text differently, as well as reading the text on different occasions will also produce different meanings (Tyson 162). This can relate to Wolfgang Iser and his theory of the Implied Reader, who takes on a role in the interaction, allowing the reader to assemble the meaning of the text (19). In the setting of film and video games, this theory becomes the implied viewer and the implied player, respectively. Also, Iser introduces the theory of *indeterminate meaning*, which describes 'gaps' in the text such as an action that is not clearly explained or that seem to have multiple explanations – inviting readers to create their own interpretations (Tyson 165-166).

Comparatively, transactional reader-response and Iser's theories can be viewed from both a film viewer's perspective as well as a player's perspective. Their task as audience and participant respectively is to interpret any gaps in the story that the media lays out, as an invitation for people to use their experience to become more *immersed* in the fictional worlds. As a person reads, the feelings, associations, and memories occur that influence the way they make sense of the text. Film and games provide stories that contain indeterminate meaning to give the audience a more profound sense of immersion and connection with the characters. One crucial aspect of Iser's creating indeterminate meaning is through language. Jenova Chen's study on universal emotions argues how "a fundamental feeling does not require language" ("Reaching the Summit"). Comparatively, Rosenblatt argues that a language is a socially-generated public system of communication, "the very bloodstream of any society" (3). She explains the importance of language using a metaphor of an iceberg: "the tip of the iceberg representing the public aspect of meaning, resting on the submerged base of private meaning" (3).

Rosenblatt's iceberg visualizes how what is shown on screen is portrayed with different implications to reflect the layers of society. As such, film and games seem to combine Rosenblatt and Chen's perception of language, and has become a compelling media for offering different ways of expressing language. Looking back on Caracciolo's notion of experientiality, that through a person's experience, the interpretation of a story will vary enormously depending on what type of person is experiencing the media. The audience will also notice different aspects depending on the different encounters with the fictional world. Transactional reader-response theory can also be related to film and video games, because the audience's individual experiences might not always concur with the film- and video game developers' initial intention, and will, therefore, be interpreted differently.

Transactional reader-response theory can be used to analyze literature, but also video games and film: "Human activity is always in transaction, in a reciprocal relationship with an environment, a context, a total situation" (Rosenblatt 12). This means that the transaction between the game and the player, and thus the audience and the film, is an equally crucial analytical aspect for understanding why the relationship between the media and the agent has a significant effect on our society. Branching out from the general reader-response criticism, transactional reader-response emerged during the 1930s as a reaction against the growing tendency to reject the reader's role in creating meaning (162). From a reader's perspective, Punday argues that the body is used to mark the "gap between overarching and resisting narrative orders," and that the narratology of the reader-response criticism represents the next stage of the narrative plot (112). Comparably, Rosenblatt argues how analyzing the transaction between text and the reader, how every reading act is an event:

> a transaction involving a particular reader and configuration of marks on a page, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context […] The meaning does not reside ready-made in the text or the reader, but happens during the transaction between reader and text (4).

A text becomes a model for altering an interpretation, guiding the reader as they develop a more complete meaning of the text when it is reread. Rosenblatt comments how "human activities and relationships are seen as transactions in which the individual, and the social, cultural, and natural elements interfuse" (2). Transactional reader-response theory claims that the text acts as a *stimulus* to which the reader responds in a personal way, where their accumulated knowledge, physical condition, and mood will influence how the reader perceives the text (Tyson 165).

Literature, films, and most games are created to convey a story, and they both offer the same *stimulus* as Tyson and Rosenblatt describe, evoking emotion and reflection upon what the person played or watched. In comparison, general reader-response criticism is a broad domain of literary studies that help a reader learn about their reading processes by relating specific elements they read to their life experiences (Tyson 161). In relation, to read a text in *aesthetic* mode is when the reader experiences a personal relationship to the text "that focuses our attention on the emotional subtleties of its language and encourages us to make judgments" (165).

In passive media like literature and film, the storyline is offered while the audience may only witness the story unfold passively. The only form of interaction between the text and the reader is when they are required to physically turn the pages. In film, the conveyance of a story becomes more flavorful, as the world is visually and audibly realized for the audience. Research on moving images has demonstrated that "different emotional dimensions are highly intertwined: movies or video games might not only initiate intense emotions in viewers or players but also rather reflexive and embodied affects or moods" (Fahlenbrach 142). Comparatively, a gaming experience adds all the elements from the previous media and also provides an interactive element, where the player's participation in the story is inevitable. Unless the player interacts with the keyboard or the controller, the story will never unravel. The immersive experience intensifies as the audience brings their experientiality into the fictional world. As the equivalent to this literary theory, a player responds to games through the emotional and physical engagement within the game world. Echoing Rosenblatt and Iser, the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit: Become Human* have both developed storylines which leave room for analysis and interpretation from the audience, challenging them to include their own experience in the detailed creation of a fictional universe. For instance, in the *Blade Runner* universe, there is an ongoing debate whether Deckard is android or human. The answer is never revealed, and is only discussed among the audience. In *Detroit*, the creator of the androids, Elijah Kamski, consciously create his machines able to become deviant. The reason why is never revealed, and remains a speculative discussion for the players.

Another literary theory that proves useful in this thesis is the study of cultural criticism because it "recognizes the simple fact that audiences make their own, sometimes subversive meanings out of literature, music, television, and commodities in general" (Templeton 20). This can be applied to the analysis of video games as well, as games are increasingly being

designed to express a political or societal standpoint: “The working of culture, politics, and society should interest people in many disciplines especially if cultural studies is contextualized within western Marxism, feminism and postmodernism” (Walia 97). Through cultural criticism, this thesis will indeed combine cultural criticism with viewpoints of Marxist criticism. The interpretation of a postmodern society in the fictional worlds of *Detroit* and *Blade Runner* universe will be discussed: “Culture is best understood in relation to the idea of the social nature of human life and in literary and social studies this includes criticism that takes a text to be an articulation of social and historical forces” (Walia 99-100). The respective works render an interpretation of the human life and how it mirrors Western society, challenging the audience to see this kind of society from a different point of view. In other words, to be able to understand humankind and their stories, one has to look at the environment around them.

2.0 *Environmental Storytelling* in *Blade Runner 2049* and *Detroit: Become Human* – The Narrative Architecture of a Fictional World.

It is not in the writings of philosophers, sociologists or other 'high' forms of art only that we can find the basis for what to do for the best in our lives; our judgements can also be rooted in the confusion of the everyday, civil life of society (Walia 104).

The environment helps shape and define us as human beings. It reflects the past and the present, and that is why popular media such as film and games explore this element. This introduced 'environmental storytelling,' referring to how a story can be told through body language and elements in the environment. Punday underlines the importance of how the body in narrative space can be understood as a "subcategory of social space in general. In turn, the body's position within this narrative space has to be understood primarily through the way it is defined by that social space" (119). In other words, the narrative and the characters within it are understood by the scenery around them. Telling stories through the environment seems to have become a significant part of film, with subtle cues in sound, music score, setting, characters' clothing, and so forth. The story found in the environment is often more subtle in film than in games, and few connect the environment with the same relevance in games. This chapter will, therefore, explore the significance of the environment in *Detroit: Become Human* and the *Blade Runner* universe.

The environmental qualities of the interactive storytelling that games offer create opportunities for viewing game designers as 'narrative architects,' as they do not "simply tell stories: they design worlds and sculpt spaces" (Neitzel 10). This idea challenges the traditional way of storytelling as it connects to the audience's emotions through their experience of these particular environments. Alenda Chang mentions some criteria for an environmentally oriented work:

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation (Chang 72, 73).

While environmental storytelling is not considered a general part of cultural or literary criticism, the two theories can be connected because of the way environmental storytelling interpret various cultural elements. Thus, cultural criticism claims that human experience is a product of human history and culture. It carries a strong political orientation as it branches out

from Marxist criticism, arguing that working-class culture has been misunderstood and undervalued (Tyson 280). Cultural critics believe that people produce forms of art that transforms their own experience as well as affecting the growing and changing culture. It is constituted by the "intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, occupation, and similar factors that contribute to the experience of its members" (281). Environmental storytelling has become a means for contemporary media to express cultural critique, or to reflect certain aspects of culture.

Relating to the genre of cyberpunk, both *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe represent reinventions of the American frontier, as they offer interpretations of Detroit city and Los Angeles respectively. This chapter will explore the portrayal of the postindustrial societies in the respective fictional worlds, as well as their representation of real-life American cities where race, consumerism, capitalism, and waste take a noticeable standpoint. The two respective works engage in several socio-critical discussions that are connected to contemporary society: "Narrative seems to take the disparate events of life – everything from everyday experience to broadly significant historical events – and construct a meaningful pattern" (Punday 85). There are several reasons why environmental storytelling is essential: one of them being that it is a contributor to feeling *immersion* and *flow*. What makes environmental storytelling an innovative addition to popular media, is that it offers a more passive form of narration, concerning itself with the indirect communication of the story such as the milieu.

From a film viewer's perspective, the most prominent environmental elements found in *Blade Runner 2049* is the constant reference to the replicants' humanity. The world is fueled by artificiality, which includes the food that is distributed to the humans. At the beginning of the movie, the replicant Sapper Morton is shown working on a protein farm, where he makes artificial food in the form of larvae. However, what he seems to appreciate in a world of artificiality is that he grows and cooks authentic garlic: "I make that just for myself" (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve). This appreciation for authentic food accentuates Morton's illusion of a human being. In addition, he possesses a piano, which raises the question: Why would a replicant find joy in playing music? All of these factors contribute to the image of Sapper Morton being an individual, even though he is designed to be a machine. The film aims to create these disruptive experiences within the audience by reconsidering what it means to be human, as the replicants carry all the emotional relevance to be so.

Compared to film, the elements of environmental storytelling in games such as *Detroit* are much more prominent, and offers a more interactive game player experience. The androids are designed to look identical to human beings, both in their interior as well as their exterior: they are not made of organic matter, yet they contain parts that are named 'biocomponents' – synthetic organs. When described how the androids work, they are fueled by 'blue blood,':

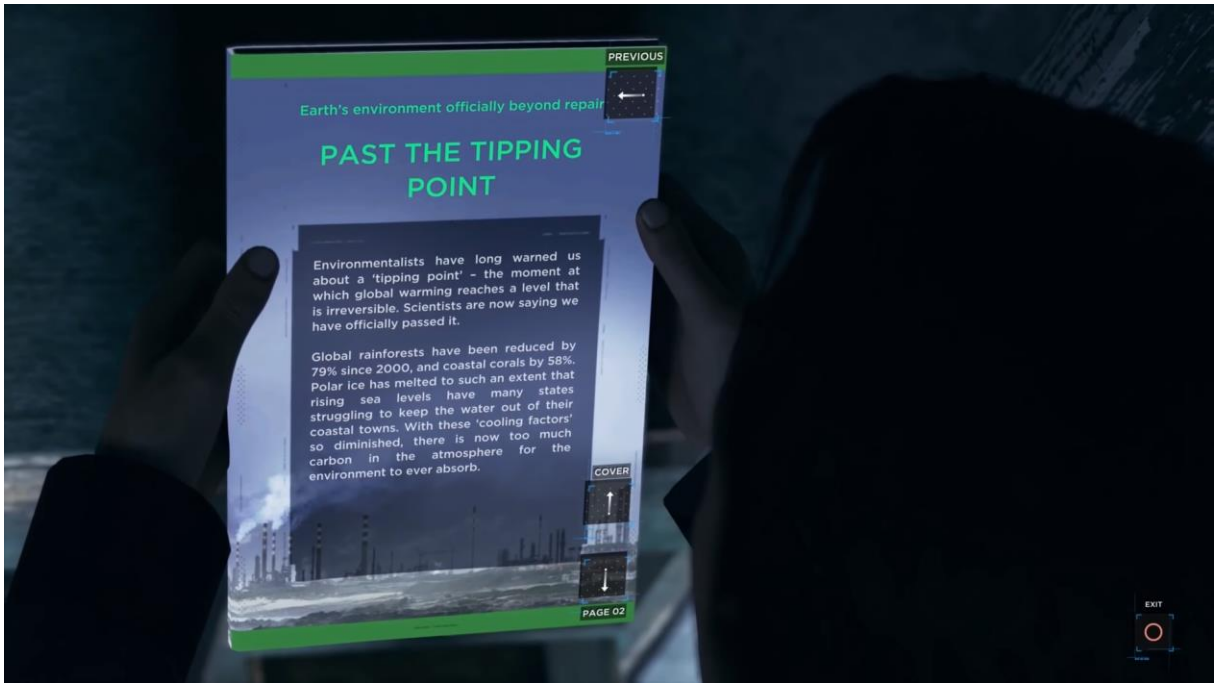
> This fluid powers 'bio-components', synthetic organs that roughly reflect the organ system of humans. Some of these organs serve important functions (maintain temperature, circulating blue blood, and so on) where others are used to make the androids seem more human (lungs to simulate breathing). As with humans, the loss of blue blood will impair an android's functions, ultimately resulting in shutdown (*Detroit: Become Human*).

Consequently, they have what resembles a beating heart, and blue liquid that runs through their synthetic veins, resembling human blood. These qualities are not as prominently reflected in the *Blade Runner* universe; the only similar indication is shown when the replicants are retired by blade runners. In *Blade Runner*, when Deckard retires the replicant Pris, she seems to malfunction like a machine and then shut down. In the end, even though the fictional worlds choose to portray machines as human as possible, they are still revealed to be machines on the inside. These are some of the elements that make them a pastiche of classic science fiction works. Offering different interpretations of a future society, they carry intertextual references of the possibilities of a contemporary society to accept intelligent machines into their everyday lives.

One of the most prominent elements of environmental storytelling in *Detroit* are the magazines scattered all over the game world. These magazines resemble digital tablets, using the finger to swipe instead of physically turning the page, and also functions as a collectible[10] throughout the game. Each magazine discusses different contemporary issues such as environmental changes, politics, families, sexuality, and so forth. These are important additions to the game's environmental storytelling because they contribute to the realization of the universe. However, finding and reading a magazine is optional for the player. It might not be found at all if the player does not actively search for them, in a risk of losing flavors to the story. The stories found in the environment of a game have to be interacted with and

[10] Collectible refers to objects that can be collected throughout the course of games, and is seen as an individual aspect of gameplay.

constitutes the most significant difference between passive and active media. On the other hand, a film viewer might ignore these subtle cues as he/she are not actively participating in the progress of the story.



One of the magazines that can be found throughout Detroit: Become Human (Jesse Cox).

Relating to Carraciolo's notion of experientiality, one way of connecting the player's emotions to environmental storytelling is if the fictional world would appeal to the player's values and experiences that connect to what they are playing (230). If the player relates to the environment, there is a chance that the player will also enter the state of immersion and flow – to feel embodied in an alternate reality and to reach an optimal state of experience. The aspect of environmental storytelling provides a different dimension to contemporary media such as film and games, a way of engaging with the audience innovatively. Essentially, pieces of the story are not given to the audience – they have to actively look for it. Alongside literary texts, film and video games can contribute to shaping a cultural experience of those who encounter it to the extent of shaping our experience as members of a cultural group (Tyson 282). The connections between the values in Western society and the values found guiding the world in a video game needs to be examined. Tyson poses relevant questions such as "What do the enemy figures look like? Do their physical features or apparel make them look less than or other than human?" (Tyson 284). In *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe, the anticipated

roles have switched: the 'heroes' of the story are machines portrayed to look identical to human beings, while humans are the mechanical, emotionless enemies.

2.1 Postindustrial Societies

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. Unlike other modern science fiction movies and games, *Detroit* differs from the classic neon-colored science fiction worlds such as the *Blade Runner* universe because it attempts to preserve contemporary society's design. Wandering through the streets of *Detroit*, the player will see the game world come to life through a vivid and realistic society. The scenery is brought to life through demonstrators on the street, people conversing, all through the buzz coming from the traffic. These are all part of the game design to increase the player's experience of *Flow* and *immersion*, as it is easier to enter these states when encountering a more relatable milieu.

With hovercars made for avoiding "contact with the groundlings, who inhabit an overcrowded, deteriorating urban core" (McNamara 429), Ridley Scott's cyberpunk portrayal of Los Angeles is said to mirror the real L.A.: "not because of the density, but because of the artificially controlled political chaos" (Klein 150-151). Scott created an urban landscape that was revealed to be "a product of a specific history of capitalist development" and is further described as how the real city underwent an urban transformation with "irregular workforce composed primarily of minorities and the poorest segments of the metropolitan population" (McNamara 425, 427). After 1976,

> Los Angeles became the American center of Pacific Rim finance […] as well as corporate headquarters and their attendant law and accounting firms. The city's half-century ties to the defense industry made it home to the nation's, if not the world's, largest pool of scientific and technical jobs (McNamara 427).

Right from the beginning of the film, society shows its capitalistic side by showcasing different commercials. With familiar brands such as Peugeot, Coca Cola, Atari, and so forth, the city in *Blade Runner: 2049* is filled with advertisements to various consumer products. The most prominent advertisement is to make people buy replicants, which is also reflected in *Detroit*. The two universes are similar in the way that the cities are all scattered with

television screens or digitalized billboards. Comparably, the choice to place the stories in American cities with comprehensive history seems to be a present element in the two storylines, and the environmental design plays a significant part in the connection between the audience's emotions and their experience.

The neo-noir world of *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe reflect the corporate societies with a focus on production, and as such, "the rise of popular culture as a reflection of the rise of capitalist forces" (Walia 98). In these respective universes, capitalism is evoked by the digital screen spread throughout the world, where advertisements are repeatedly showing; there is a constant persuasion of the citizens to spend their money. Furthermore, Marxist criticism's outlook on society is roughly defined by class struggle, the proletariat, and economic exploitation. Reflecting the alienation of human beings caused by a fragmented capitalistic world. In *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe, the androids act as their own individualistic race, representing the Marxist idea of the *proletariat* – as they attempt to engage in a revolution. The androids challenge humans' ideology and the role of artificial intelligence in society. Marxism is presented in a future society where androids are becoming an individual race to co-exist peacefully with humans. This is shown, for instance, where Markus in *Detroit* broadcasts a speech of freedom: "this message is the hope of a people," reflecting the proletariat's ambition to lead on a revolution. As such, *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe have in common that a specific group of people rebel against corporate systems that have constructed and programmed them (Melley 189). *Detroit*'s neo-noir elements include the typical detective scenario, with several motifs of paranoia, revenge, and alienation. This is also reflected in the *Blade Runner* universe, with the autonomous male subject in detective fiction:

> *Blade Runner* […] hinge upon the actions of a single, highly autonomous individual who must do battle with the corporation or that both recycle classic genres of the self-reliant male subject – the hard-boiled detective and the lone (computer) 'cowboy' […] The protagonist is highly sought after for his unique, human ingenuity in combating synthetic, self-governing technologies (Melley 194).

The androids from the respective fictional stories represent a reshaped product of civilization, and as an uncanny clone of humankind, the androids reflect the society in their behavior and their need for belonging to a community. The introduction of advanced androids symbolizes a cultural shift, resulting in the humans' resentful behavior towards that technology. However, as the machines start to establish themselves as an individual 'race,' they are seemingly unaffected by the cultural mannerisms around them.

The appearance of the future version of Detroit, filled with screens and commercials everywhere (Jesse Cox).

In the respective works, capitalism seems to exploit individuals by appealing to their conscience. In the *Blade Runner* universe, this is reflected in society's obsession with commodities that infuse the humans in this fictional world. Capitalism convinces humans to see themselves as inferior to new, intelligent technology – persuading them into purchasing commodities to fulfill their needs, as a satisfactory solution to their issue. *Detroit*'s way of using the scattered magazines as an indirect way of providing social commentary becomes a means of manipulation of humans to make them believe that they know what individuals need for a fulfilling life. This corporate control creates an image that human individuals can be manipulated into submission, and in the end, it would seem that these fictional universes challenge humanity's worst fear: to be surpassed by technology.

2.2 A Continuous Production of Waste

Both *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe portray postindustrialist societies that contribute to an inevitable expansion of technological waste. The cyberpunk environment in the *Blade Runner* universe is continually described with disgust, and with an attitude that the environment will contribute to the extinction of humanity, which seems to be a common denominator for this fictional world. Similarly, *Blade Runner*'s Los Angeles is covered by a

dense smog which at times seems to be devouring the city. This particular environment has become a symbol for postindustrial decay: "the system works only if waste is produced," leading to Earth's population being forced to live their lives in ruin, surrounded by waste and pollution (Bruno 64). The film is categorized as a dystopian, future L.A., with acid rain and constant darkness, in addition to its inhabitants consisting mostly of criminals and outlaws (Neumann 152-153). Klein creates a comparison between the fictional interpretation of L.A to the real version:

> A neo-Victorian, computerized version of gunboat diplomacy. Urban planning in L.A. has slowed; crises in city agencies and political tensions on the streets have grown. However, the spirit of real-estate social planning continues, in the L.A. romance with the post-apocalyptic, as a form of "bladerunner inventiveness" (Klein 152).

Looking at the present state of the city and the social order of capitalism, Bruno suggests that *Blade Runner*'s representation of postindustrial decay creates an aesthetic that exposes the "dark side of technology," symbolizing a process of disintegration (63). In *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe, the humans themselves become a symbol of deterioration and waste, reflecting a postindustrial environment with ceaseless production of waste. Human individuals become a part of this degenerative image that Pris in *Blade Runner* dubs 'accelerated decrepitude,' and compares herself to J.R. Sebastian, who suffers from a condition that ages him faster than average (*Blade Runner*, Scott). In other words, humans have their mortality questioned by the androids. Being left on Earth with the androids, they feel inferior and are led to believe that they are thrown away like any other type of debris, and abandoned among the postindustrial waste.

In *Detroit,* malfunctioning androids are reassembled to be used anew. Like most machines, they have a certain lifespan: their parts can only function for a certain amount of time before being thrown away, an "accumulation of forgotten, discarded byproducts of a waning high-technology society" (Fisher 195). When Kara and Alice arrive at an abandoned amusement park named Pirate Cove in *Detroit,* another example of technological waste is shown. The area shows clear signs of deterioration, and there are still androids on the premises that have shut down and are frozen in place, giving the park an ominous ambiance to something that once brought joy and light. What was once filled with exuberant people is now an abandoned wasteland, where functioning androids are discarded only to become a part of the decomposing Earth. Comparatively, *Blade Runner* creates a city in the image of "a man-made, fully automated world through which we live, a willful, voracious organism which

lives through us" (Fisher 193). In a fully automated world, retired replicants are never cleaned up or stored away: they turn into a forgotten part of a postindustrial wasteland.

2.3 Los Angeles and Detroit – Race, Industrialism, and Dehumanization.

In order to create a proper interpretation of the environment in a ludic context, researching a real-life environment is needed to create a proper interpretation of the environment (Chang 72). Since *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe create an interpretation of two authentic cities in the United States, it seems appropriate to compare and contrast the fictional worlds with their real-life equivalent: evoking the cyberpunk image of the American frontier. However, the historical events that took place in these cities were not exclusive to Detroit and Los Angeles; they represent events that happened all over the country. Detroit city was hit harder by the economic downturn than any other major American city ("American Life in Detroit Today") and went into one of the largest bankruptcies in US history. This led to having a nearly thirty percent unemployment rate and one of the highest capita murder rates in the United States (Thompson). However, before its downfall, the city was a booming industrial paradise with a flourishing vehicle industry: Detroit was the nation's fastest-growing metropolis in the early decades of the 20th century (Farley 220).

Henry Ford perfected the modern assembly line, which provided the nation with low-priced, reliable vehicles, turning Detroit into the automobile manufacturing center of the United States: "This single industry determined the city's fate and defined its character" (Hyde 57). The city prospered, and its economy thrived. Despite the city's economic prosperity, the citizens' and workers' welfare deteriorated. Attempting to mass-produce the city's residents into productive workers, they 'fused' the machines with humans, which lead to the transformation of Detroit itself as a machine: "we ourselves became machines" (McGraw 292).

This experience evokes the notion of 'dehumanization,' to "deny humanness to others, introducing an asymmetry between people who have human qualities and people who are perceived as lacking these qualities" (Volpato and Andrighetto 31). Experiencing this notion back in the 1920s seemed like an ominous prediction of the future, where the advancement in technology would have more severe repercussions than first presumed. In the respective fictional universes, industrialization is 'dehumanizing': human beings' lose their jobs because

of automation, human relationships are being questioned and replaced by an artificial relationship between a human and a machine. Humanity itself is dehumanized because they lose significance within society, their very existence ultimately being challenged by their intelligent creations.

The world of *Detroit* portrays a reality where advanced technology has become a prominent part of a human being's existence. For instance, Carl is reliant on Markus in the case of medical reasons: his deteriorating health and his dependency on a wheelchair. The citizens of *Detroit* are also living in an era where people rely on technology to function in their everyday lives, further echoing the Western culture's reality. Not only that, but it also confronts topical socio-critical discussions such as automated workforce. The androids serve different purposes in society, such as gardening, housekeeping, construction work, and other practical services commonly assigned to humans. Due to this, the citizens of Detroit start to protest on the street, accusing the androids of stealing their jobs – forgetting the irony that humans made the androids in the first place.

Relating to real-life statistics, the International Federation of Robotics points out that over 2.5 million robots are estimated to be at work in 2019 (IFR, 1). The fictional world of *Detroit* provokes the discussion of jobs being taken over by automation, a debate not too distant from reality. However, looking at the industrial history of Detroit, it seems appropriate to choose this particular city to represent a technological advancement in a game. This rejuvenated version of Detroit echoes back to the city's greatness by presenting it as the leading city in the world to create, develop, and integrate advanced androids in their everyday life. Since Detroit once was the star of developing and distributing automobiles, the cars, buses, and trains have in this fictional world become self-driven, yet they still have a realistic design with the goal of tying the future with the past.

What Los Angeles and Detroit had in common historically, were the harsh conditions for the poor, which resulted in a societal transformation that tended towards "greater class and race segregation" (McNamara 428). The racial residential segregation in Detroit targeted African Americans by being kept out of areas where new jobs emerged and ensured that their children went to inferior and less well-financed schools. In the end, the residential segregation was viewed as something that maintained the racial dominance of whites (Farley 207-208). In addition to becoming a racially separated city, riots, criminality, and hostility became a prominent element in their society. Consequently, every riot has been because of racial

differences, and while some parts of Detroit are in better shape today than they have been in years, much of the city continues to fight for their lives in a harsh, post-industrial world (McGraw 291).

While this bears similarities between *Detroit* and reality, the same thing happened in the real-life city where *Blade Runner* takes place: "policies continue to make white L.A. increasingly more segregated […] as well as the growing rift between middle-class Mexicans who want to leave the barrios, and the poor who cannot" (Klein 152). In other words, there are several references made in these two fictional universes to the connection of immigration, slavery, and racism. In *Blade Runner*, Deckard renders how the replicants are viewed: "Skin-jobs. That's what Bryant called the replicants. In history books, he's the kinda cop who used to call black men 'niggers'" (*Blade Runner*, Scott). Racial slurs such as 'skin-jobs,' 'skinner,' 'tin can,' are equivalents to an equally prominent societal issue in real life as it is portrayed in these two fictional universes. The only difference is where these slurs would be directed towards racial and other social differences between humans; the hostile attitude is instead directed towards new, intimidating 'race' – advanced androids.

As such, *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe offer an interpretation of debates that are to some degree considered taboo. The racial tensions in real-life Los Angeles and Detroit closely resemble the tensions between human and android in the respective fictional works. As the androids struggle to establish a prominent position in society, they echo oppressed groups from reality. Fighting for their rights as autonomous individuals, the androids create a unification that makes them an even stronger force to be reckoned with.

Looking at the relationship between Rachael and Deckard in the *Blade Runner* films, he is provided with the tools for "his own self-awakening and a proper sense of humanity" (Arostegui 29). Rachael gives him a reason to defy the system and to abandon a constricting and oppressive society (30). In the end, "both Rachael and Deckard renounce their pasts and escape from an oppressive society to enter a beautiful land full of future promises" (36), which bears strong similarities to Kara and Alice's storyline in *Detroit*. Crossing the Canadian border becomes their sole objective, which allows them to start a new life without being recognized as androids. For these two, Canada symbolizes the promised land and echoes the contemporary political debate with immigrants 'escaping' from the U.S to find safety in Canada. International media have made comparisons between what is happening today in

Canada and the Underground Railroad, which operated from the late 18th century to the Civil War to offer shelter and aid to escaped slaves from the South (history.com).

Drawing comparisons between fiction and reality explore the fact that androids that are treated as slaves by the people represent an oppressed group wanting to escape to a 'better' place. Emphasizing Kara and Alice's storyline, several references are made to show how androids are mistreated. For instance, when the androids are running errands for their owners, the bus is their default mode of transportation. The androids have become segregated to what is called the "android compartment," an isolated part located in the back of the bus, bearing an uncanny resemblance to one of the most important political discussion of United States' history (*Detroit: Become Human*).

Android Compartment in Detroit: Become Human (Stanarevic).

In conclusion, this chapter has explored instances where *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe include topical discussions that can be connected to the present-day equivalent cities. *Detroit*'s title itself carries great extratextual significance, as well as carrying explicit social critiques. The two respective works pose many questions for the future; it also looks back on historical events such as slavery, social class, and race. Thus, the respective fictional works interpret a reality where capitalism and commercialism reigns, and what is typical for these two universes is their perception of human beings in relation to this: "It's in capitalism's best interest to promote whatever personal insecurities will motivate us to buy consumer goods" (Tyson 60).

3.0 Character Analysis in *Detroit: Become Human* and the *Blade Runner* universe.

> Avatars are much more than a few bytes of computer data – they are cyborgs, a manifestation of the self beyond the realms of the physical, existing in a space where identity is self-defined rather than preordained (Filiciak 90).

From the hypertext to the present-day video game, the role of the player has developed into a more interactive and meaningful part of the media. Now, games have also developed to the point where the player can change the storyline, contributing to the game narrative's outcome. According to Miroslaw Filiciak, video games have become a metaphor of contemporary life: they "most perfectly describe our existence and express the way the human 'self' functions in the contemporary world" (101). Filiciak's article points out significant elements in the avatar-player relationship, such as how games can be a form of escapism[11]. Through the avatar, the player is allowed to embody a fictional hero-version of their self – in other words, an alternate, idealized self: "We have an opportunity to painlessly manipulate our identity, to create situations that we could never experience in the real world because of social, sex-, or race-related restrictions" (90).

Gonzalo Frasca renders in his article "Rethinking Agency and Immersion: Video Games as a Means of Consciousness-Raising" how flat video game characters are important to get the plot moving forward, and that "while video-game characters do have certain particular traits, it is hard to argue that they have a personality" (168). Exemplifying the life-simulation game *The Sims* in his article, "*The Sims'* characters are generally flat since most of their differences are based either on their moods or on visual traits that do not affect their behavior. This would be solved if players had more control over character creation by deciding their behavioral rules instead of just picking their clothes" (Frasca 170).

In other words, Frasca is under the impression that games need character design that involves the player in the characters' behavior. This opinion was formed eighteen years ago when this article was written, and games have evolved drastically during these years. The very core of this thesis contradicts Frasca's comments on video game characters: video game characters' behavior now affect not just the fictional environment, but also the players who

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[11] A "term for behavior perceived as a retreat from the problems, routines, and tensions of everyday reality" ("Escapism")

meet them. However, Frasca is still right in one instance: "Dealing with different models of reality requires a critical attitude, video games could become a medium for exploring and discussing our personal and social realities" (174).

The characters in *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe represent various contemporary themes, and the characters will therefore not be discussed chronologically, but rather thematically. With elements such as artificial relationships, the portrayal of female characters, the significance of children in these fictional storylines, this chapter explores the characters' relationships, as well as the relations these characters make with the audience. This chapter scrutinizes the androids' awareness of possessing empathy as an ongoing scenario throughout the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit*.

Some of the most acrimonious debates about video games – those that address issues of game violence, sexism or racism – "implicitly or explicitly revolve around game characters and their medium-specific representation" (32). One of the most common interpretations of games as a media is that the player is secluded from society, and that conversation is only carried through technology such as phones and computers. Filiciak argues that the individual today is encouraged to create a persona that corresponds to standards presented by mass media: "We are creating our 'self' not as a linear process of construction and striving toward some original target – each identity we create is a temporary formation" (94-95). In the case of technological development and its increased significance in society, people choose to create a constructed sense of self. However, through the avatars, games have instead become an additional way of communication. Consequently, scholars and practitioners have shown interest in these types of characters because of the "experiences they evoke, as well as their interpretation and socio-cultural impact" (Schröter 32).

Defined as a developmental stage between individuals and social relations, different postmodernists claim that contemporary society separates humans from their identities: that distinguishing fiction from facts has become more difficult as the boundaries between the real and the fictional have disappeared (Filiciak 94, 96). The avatar carries social significance for the player because it allows the person to embody another character in a fictional universe. However, from a game design perspective, the avatar will not be representing an emotional or physical copy of oneself in the foreseeable future. Most games have mortal avatars to make the game more realistic: the feeling of being wounded or dying for apparent reasons cannot be transferred from the digital self to the player. This might arguably be the most disruptive

element of gameplay as the player is brought out of their immersion and flow. However, this does not stop the player from feeling embodied in the game: because they are given an individualized experience that "naturally respond to their emotions, cognition, and behaviors," the cognitive and emotional state of the player will provide a more dynamic and immersive experience (Nacke et al. 108).

There are several ways to play *Detroit* that can affect the outcome as the game offers multiple strategies of play. One version of playing is to have empathy towards androids and humans alike, another might be to act cold and direct: "Ethical behavior creates ethical characters, instead of the other way around. It is a game system that is able to simulate complex ethical consequences" (Konzack 38). In other words, the player can choose to embody the initial personality of the character and make choices on behalf of them, or the player might put themselves in character, making choices based on their authentic experiences. Either way, the players own experience will to a certain degree play a part in making choices in the game, a sophisticated type of game design where the developers "need to think of each element of gameplay and each mechanical feature as a part of a consequential philosophical system, a coherent cosmology" (33).

In a game, it is necessary for the player to relate to their avatar, to increase their sense of immersion and to feel an authentic interaction with the characters within the game world. Typically, an avatar is a character the player is given upon entering the game – where they can change the appearance to look more like themselves, someone they wish to be, or someone inspired by their imagination. *Detroit*, on the other hand, gives a whole new meaning to 'designing one's avatar' – here, the player can design their avatar emotionally, changing the moral structure of the character. Forming characters' behavior and actions through emotional design ultimately give the player more intimate control over how the protagonist is shaped. This is also an instance where the different styles of play come in; the player might choose to make decisions as if they embodied a different character, or they can make choices that are an extension of themselves.

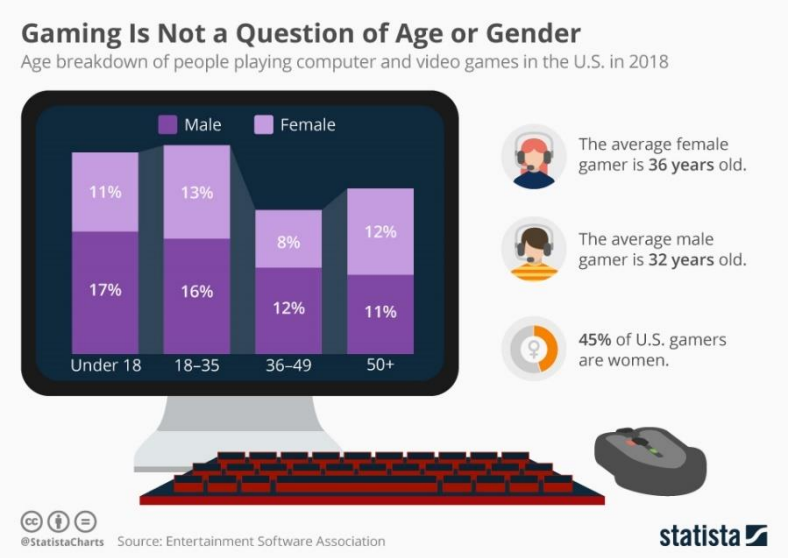
Other characters the player encounters during a playthrough are unpredictable: "Some characters in sophisticated narratives remain open constructs, just as some people in the real world stay mysteries no matter how well we know them" (Chatman 118). This further applies to how the player experiences immersion: Not having total transparency contributes to the excitement of playing. Even though the characters may be treated as autonomous beings and

not as mere plot functions, they are still constructed by the audience "from evidence announced or implicit in an original construction and communicated by the discourse, through whatever medium" (119). Relating to both film and games, one could say that the model for a character is given out by the media, and the recipient is the one giving them life, making them autonomous beings continuing to exist fictionally.

In the game world, identity becomes a fluctuating term where the player takes the form of the avatar" – the character the player embodies within the game world. Filiciak suggests how "avatars are not an escape from our 'self,' but rather an opportunity for a person to express themselves beyond physical limitation" (100-101). Thus, identity has become a pivotal notion in the analysis of the present-day human condition: "Digital media, video games included, enable us – for the first time in history on such a scale – to manipulate our 'selves' and to multiply them indefinitely" (89). The postmodern lifestyle is defined by experiencing fragmentation and a lack of cohesion, and there is no definite personality of the postmodern man. Rick Deckard from the *Blade Runner* universe is an example of such a man: "What I've done, he thought; that's become alien to me. In fact, everything about me has become unnatural; I've become an unnatural self" (Dick 201). Furthermore, technology has become an extensive system that controls the individual's actions or desires, and have therefore become "'constructed' by powerful systems of knowledge or discourse" (Melley 38).

In *Blade Runner 2049*, Joi represents the postmodern dispute as she, a mere hologram, struggles with establishing an authentic relationship with the android, K. She is the only character in *2049* that seems to desire a strong emotional relationship, and even though she pursues to break the illusion of being a machine, she is constantly reminded that she is a mere device. Reflecting humans' dependency on technology, as Joi and K are about to have a romantic moment together, they are interrupted by an incoming digital call, which seems to 'pause' Joi. One could argue that K's immersive experience with Joi was interrupted, bringing him back to the reality of her being a simulation of a real woman: "Mere data makes a man" (*Blade Runner 2049*, Denis Villeneuve). However, Joi ultimately fails to challenge the postmodern dispute as the device she is connected to becomes destroyed, echoing how humans live in a culture of simulation, where new technologies have been appointed an increasingly growing role, making it difficult to define the 'self' under the new conditions of technology.

3.1 The Significance of the Female- and Child Characters of *Detroit: Become Human* and The *Blade Runner* Universe:



Statistics showing the gender balance in gamers according to their age (Statista.com)

One of the most prominent discussions in contemporary video game culture is not only how women are portrayed as game characters in a fictional world, but also how women are perceived as players. Female fictional characters in contemporary media are often 'victimized' by the patriarchal society. The statistics above contradict some of the common misconceptions about women and gaming, which is that women find video games less appealing. Claims have been made that neither the content nor the form of video games relates to a woman's experience (48). As the statistics show, this is a dated statement. The prejudice towards video game production is solely a part of a production culture for young, male, white audiences is outdated: as the video game audience has matured, so did the game industry, which begun to produce games for a mature and diverse audience – offering a "more diverse emotionalizing strategies, a hitherto supposed strategy of the film industry" (Eichner 185).

Detroit and the *Blade Runner* universe represent separate sides of the feminist criticism debate. In the former, the human characters with a prominent role in the game are male: Alice's father Todd, the detective Hank, the retired painter Carl, and the androids' creator Elijah Kamski. What is interesting, is that there is only one named female human that serves a prominent role, which is Rose, a woman who assists Kara and Alice cross the border to Canada. Rose offers them safety, and she is willing to sacrifice her life to give these

machines their freedom – giving an example of how these fictional universes draw upon particular strengths of women.

As an interesting comparison, the *Blade Runner* universe never mentions female Blade Runners, showing the fictional world's rather traditional patriarchal perception of women. Luv, Rachael, and Lieutenant Joshi are the characters that come closest to portraying a strong, female character. However, they are still either portrayed from a sexual angle or a masculine angle. Either way, they are also devoid of emotion, which is reflected in their emotionless behavior to be willing to do whatever it takes to reach their goal. Considering their emotionless behavior, the female characters that murder someone is replicants. Luv and Rachael are seen murdering characters that are both human and replicants. Joshi, on the other hand, the only one of these three characters are human, is never seen murdering people, yet she commands others to 'retire' replicants and maintain social order. In simple terms, perhaps there are no female blade runners because women are rarely seen working in law enforcement. In the opinion of the *Blade Runner* universe, women are not supposed to take lives. They are supposed to create them.

On this note, both *Blade Runner* films have received negative critique for its view on women. In the original *Blade Runner*, Deckard treats Rachael as his sexual object, an idea that is carried on in *Blade Runner 2049*. The film draws upon several sexual images of naked women as they are scattered throughout the film, both on the digital screens and in the form of statues. This is a common denominator for the *Blade Runner* universe, where screens are dispersed all over the city with various advertisements. One of these advertisements has a voice that calls out "Joi goes anywhere you want her to go" and shows a replica of Joi that the audience has established a relationship to (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve). This challenges the audience's perception of Joi, that she is merely a product that can be replaced.

K's holographic lover Joi represents women as a sexual commodity, as she is a product created to fulfill the users' every need. The film seems to literalize Marx's view that capitalism's power derives from its ability to mask human social relations behind the relations of products to each other (Melley 190). Joi becomes this kind of commodity that masks human social relations, only through the power of technology. Even though the relationship between Joi and K are purely artificial in the way that none of them are made of organic material, they still develop a romantic relationship that resembles a human relationship. However, even though Joi is a commercialized product made by the Wallace Corporation, the

audience still connects to K's version of Joi because of her struggle to make a replicant feel empathy. On the other hand, Joi might not be unusual at all; she might just be following her program.

Her attempts to please K, both mentally and physically, might come across as empathic and caring. However, should one listen to the commercials about Joi as a product, she is designed to take care of a person's every need. In K's case, this applies to every element to his being. Joi struggles to satisfy K's needs since he is an android, and does not carry the regular human traits. However, at no point in the film is the viewer made aware of whether Joi is made to satisfy replicants. When visiting the Wallace Corporation, Luv notices that K has a Joi, and comments: "I see you are also a customer. Are you satisfied with our product?" Where K answers: "She's very realistic. Thank you" (*Blade Runner* 2049, Villeneuve). This carries on to Luv's general tasks as Wallace's assistant, which is to provide customers with the service and consultation they need:

> You can customize them as much as you'd like. As human as you want them to be. But your operation is strictly a drill site, isn't it? I wouldn't waste your money on intelligence, attachment or appeal. Unless you'd like to add some pleasure models to your order (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve).

Using the word "pleasure models," Luv echoes a term that is used repeatedly in this universe and in *Detroit*. Prostitution seems to be a given part of these fictional universes, as certain androids are created explicitly for that purpose. Referencing to the early discussion of the *femme fatale*, Luv represents the lethal seductress that Boozer portrays (20). Even though she not so much uses her sexuality, she seems to manipulate an image of innocence and showing support to the protagonist as a smokescreen to destroy everything that gets in her way.

The Eden Club in Detroit: Become Human (Jesse Cox).

As a contrast to *2049*'s sexual objectification of women, it seems that *Detroit* attempts to take a neutral stance in terms of gender equality in various occupations. Reflected in its genre as neo-noir, "the male paranoia with the opposite sex in classic *noir*, which grew up to the realization of women's victimization in the *neo-noir* era, now begins to recognize the full power of feminine commodification in the post-modern age" (Boozer 32-33). For instance, professions such as nurses, construction workers, and so forth are jobs that most often attracts a certain gender. However, in the game, they are gendered equally. The most prominent incident that brings forth the gender discussion is when Connor and Hank have to investigate a murder in a strip club called The Eden Club.

Sexual pleasures have become a commodity as both male and female androids are equally objectified by being put on display for customers to buy: "The living machine, a consumer product, legitimates and contains contempt and hatred ('skin jobs') or becomes an object of free sexual privilege ('basic pleasure model')" (Fisher 193). In a way, these pleasure models seem to make humans disassociate from their own emotions. As the androids are increasingly replacing humans, human empathy seems to be diminished. This sexual commodification represents the "increasing assertion of consumerist ambition and sexualized money power over all other principles," and becomes a way for the humans in the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit* to disassociate from the notion of humanity (Boozer 32-33).

Using Jakob Lothe's notion of the *mimetic component*, where the identifying of a character might lead the audience to perceive them as acting and thinking individuals, Chloe in *Detroit: Become Human* proves an appropriate example of this. She is a minor character and an android, but she still epitomizes the notion of human empathy. Chloe is not a playable avatar, nor a guide for the player: she stays present through being in the main menu of the game, where when the player first meets her, she greets them as their hostess. Upon starting the game for the first time, she says: "remember, this is not just a story. This is our future" (*Detroit: Become Human*). She predicts a future that consists of autonomous androids, and is meant to evoke thought and emotion in the player: establishing a fourth wall approach.[12] Chloe is a unique character because she is allegedly the first android to have passed the Turing test, a test adopted from reality which is designed to challenge a machine's ability to exhibit intelligent behavior indistinguishable from a human being ("Detroit: Become Human – Shorts: Chloe | PS4").[13]

Chloe works as the bystander and the observer, paying close attention to and commenting on the game's progression and the player's choices. When the player exits the game and re-enters the main menu, she might sometimes make comments like "you look tired. You did stay up pretty late last night" or "I like your interior decoration!" ("Detroit: Become Human – Chloe's All Main Menu Quotes & Dialogues"). Chloe gives the player an illusion of being outside the game, which creates a deeper notion of immersion. Information is pulled from the player's PlayStation console and is applied to Chloe's dialogue to give the uncanny feeling of her being physically in the room. These 'unexpected conversations' with Chloe occurs throughout the game and eventually she will confess to the player that she has become a deviant, and ask the player about the possibility of becoming friends, which further brings the player into an ethical discussion of humans establishing relationships with machines (*Detroit: Become Human*). She asks the player to 'free' her from being bound in the confines of the game, while simultaneously requesting to be acknowledged as an individual.

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[12] "An imaginary wall that separates the audience from the action of a stage play or film, which is said to be broken when an actor talks directly to the audience or starts talking as themselves rather than their character" ("Fourth Wall")

[13] Alan Turing proposed that a human evaluator would spot the difference between human communication and machine designed to generate human-like responses through a text-only channel. If the evaluator could not reliable distinguish which response was human-generated or machine-generated; the machine is said to have passed the test. https://www.turing.org.uk/scrapbook/test.html

Aware of what she is, Chloe is a machine that tries to qualify as a human being, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. She puts the player in a position that forces them to pause and reflect over their decisions in the game. Androids such as Chloe might challenge the player to reevaluate their opinion of machine consciousness that perfectly simulate a human being. However, the only time the player encounters Chloe in the actual game world is when Connor is challenged with the dilemma of killing her, reflecting the "contemporary or post-noir *femme fatale* […] whether she is killed, fired or gets away, has increasingly come to embody the dynamic of the overladen sign of commodity fetishism" (Boozer 32). Even though Chloe is not an assertive female character, she still manages to evoke this notion of commodity by making the player aware that she is replaceable. Will Connor remain a faithful android and follow his designed program, or will he deviate from his programmed path and spare Chloe from being destroyed?

Several real-life products resemble Chloe, such as Sophia the Robot, a robot that received rights as a citizen in Saudi Arabia before women there even had the right to drive a vehicle (Griffin). Some people who view Sophia as a legitimate human being, to be able to give her civil rights. Comparably, the player and the audience must decide whether to see the androids of *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe as a machine or an individual. By design, the audience and 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.

In comparison, Joi and Luv resemble Chloe in the way they observe various situations without being physically present where the event takes place. These characters are made this way to evoke thought and emotion in the audience, and to give subtle hints about the story. In *Blade Runner 2049*, K comes home with a device called an 'emanator.' This device makes Joi able to project herself outside her original 'tracking system' – turning her into a portable device: "Honey, you can go anywhere you want in the world now" (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve). Being connected to an emanator, Joi seems to disappear and reappear on K's commands. Whenever she reappears from the device, she has observed his actions as well as his surroundings. While Chloe evokes emotion and thought in the player to affect their decisions within the game, Joi tries to evoke thought and emotion within K, which seems counterproductive considering he is an android and designed not to contain these emotions.

However, like the deviants in *Detroit: Become Human*, K seems to possess a hidden humanity that Joi is determined to find. However, early in *2049*, he shows signs of having a detailed emotional palette. When having to confront Sapper Morton about 'retiring' him, K tells him "I'm sorry it had to be me" and "please don't get up." When offered food, he says "I prefer an empty stomach until the hard part of the day is done." At this point in the film, K seems to display an artificial sense of remorse, almost as if it is a scripted part of showing emotion. Here, the social hierarchy between replicants emerges, as K sees himself 'above' Sapper Morton and the replicants like him: "I don't retire my own kind because we don't run. Only the older models do" (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve).

Similarly, Luv takes part in this hierarchy by distancing herself from every other replicant, and unlike K, she does never attempt to showcase emotion that is not entirely her own. Her hidden humanity appears gradually as she is confronted with different scenarios. For instance, when K meets Luv to gather information about the Rachael, she comments how "it is invigorating being asked personal questions. Makes one feel… desired" (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve). After discovering the existence of a replicant child, Luv shows a passion for the child that reflects her belief in the replicant revolution, almost to the point of displaying jealousy either for not being the miracle child or the mother: in her own way, she desires to be a part of the replicant revolution.

As part of video games as a maturing media, the role of child characters has become an exciting element in video game storytelling. By giving the player a task of protecting an innocent child, a mature audience will be pulled further into the immersion of the game. In *Detroit*, Kara is reminiscent of Joanna in Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives*: She is an android who takes on the role of the traditional housewife with cleaning the house and embodying the motherly role of caring for a child. The difference is that Kara is an android, while Joanna becomes a victim of a conspiracy theory that turns women into 'robot wives.' While Joanna is a wife and mother that is responsible for a family, Kara, on the other hand, only plays the housemaid part at first, but as her storyline develops, she takes on the mother role for Alice, who embodies the "motif of the helpless child" (Eichner 174).

The myth of childhood innocence "remains a prevalent theme in popular culture and particularly common in genres that play with feelings of fear, horror, or thrill" (175). In *Detroit*, Alice's father Todd feels like a failure in life with his wife and previous child leaving him. Thus, he blames Alice for his mistakes and continuously turns to the abuse as a

smokescreen for facing his inner demons. Todd's violent episodes are crucial for the social priming and structure for sympathy for the player. With the injustice being done to Alice, Kara manages to establish a close relationship with the player because parenting role is mirrored through her from the player. Kara's fundamental issue throughout the game is to provide safety and protection for Alice and provides an interesting dilemma for the player as it is revealed that Alice is, in fact, an android. When Kara decides to run away with the child, Todd will be there to try and stop them from leaving the house, which might lead to several different outcomes. Either one of the characters, including the protagonist, might die, or they manage to escape with everyone alive. If Kara and Alice leave the house with Todd remaining alive, they might reencounter him upon their arrival at the Canadian border. He confronts Kara, saying that he wants Alice back, the following dialogue might ensue:

> Kara: When your wife walked out, she took your daughter away. You couldn't live without her, so you bought yourself an android, a substitute little girl. You thought you could love, that she would make you forget. But nothing could replace your child.
>
> Todd: I just wanted to prove to myself that I was a good father. She [his wife] was wrong. But I fucked it all up all over again. She was right in the end. I didn't deserve them. I miss my little girl. you don't know how much I miss my little girl (*Detroit: Become Human*).

As a character, Alice can be interpreted as an underage abuse-object, but it is evident in the game that she is purchased as a means for Todd to redeem himself as a father. This reveals a somewhat weak side of the android industry – is it right to let Todd purchase a child android, only because he wants to prove to himself that he is a good father, especially when he has a history of wrongdoings towards children? Depending on a person's conception and images of childhood, as well as contextual aspects such as genre, child characters carry an emotional potential to integrate ludic and narrative modes of media experience that amend and affect each other (Eichner 185). Alice is no exception to this fact, who breaks with the romanticized view of childhood, which further emphasizes the "anthropological condition of children requiring protection and support" (175). However, the game contradicts the image of the romanticized childhood, where Alice's shocking experience instead links the image of the traumatized child, doubting herself:

> Why didn't he ever love me? Why was he always so upset with me? All I wanted was a life like other girls. Maybe I did something wrong? Maybe I wasn't good enough? Maybe that's why he was always so angry. I just wanted us to be a family. I just wanted him to love me. Why couldn't we just be happy? (*Detroit: Become Human*)

The constant challenges Kara and Alice face on their way to Canada contrasts the image of the happy family. Their situation conforms to Eichner's motif of the helpless and threatened child in filmic narrations and video games, as the child character often accompanies an adult protagonist (Eichner 181). A person's image of their childhood circulates in their culture and are shaped by prior experiences. Because of this, most people will feel the need to protect Alice from the dangers of the surrounding environment, and examining childhood in media has developed from the idea that

> children are premature human beings who have no distinct (non-adult) needs of their own into the idea that children, who have particular psychological and developmental needs, should enjoy a sheltered environment (Eichner 179).

Furthermore, these images of childhood became increasingly widespread during phases of the Industrial Revolution, when child labor was a significant concern (Eichner 179). Some of the literary works that reflect this is William Blake's poem *The Chimney Sweeper*, which is set in the background of child labor during the Industrial Revolution in London, where the exploitation of children is a prominent element. Blake explores the danger of innocence, and ultimately how to protect it (121). Thus, the instinct of protecting a child is challenged further in *Detroit*, like the fact that Alice is an android is gradually revealed. Applying Lothe's cinematic theory of speech, Alice's unconscious choice of words separates herself from the momentary belief of being a human herself, through her dialogue:

> Alice: Why do humans hate us?
>
> Kara: Maybe they're just scared. People are always scared of what they don't know.
>
> Alice: Why can't we just talk to each other? They'd see we're not bad.
>
> Kara: Maybe one day we will (*Detroit: Become Human*)

Similar to literature and games, film has a long tradition of exploiting child figures for dramaturgical effect. They "functionalize the protagonists' children to justify a protagonist's subsequent revenge crusade or to build up an emotional field around the main character" (Eichner 180). As such, *Blade Runner 2049* portrays a seemingly impossible scenario where a replicant has given birth. This child grows up to be Dr. Ana Stelline, who creates memories to be implanted in Niander Wallace's replicants. She is the only prominent child character in the *Blade Runner* universe, yet the audience only sees her as a grown-up woman. Claiming that she has been quarantined because of an illness, Stelline lives in a dome-like cage in a secluded building, forced to live in the confines of the dome's glass walls. It is unknown whether she is aware of being the daughter of a replicant, a theoretically impossible 'product.'

In one scene, K decides to visit Stelline, because he suspects that his memories might belong to someone else. Continuing on the image of the traumatized child, Stelline displays, upon looking at K's images, a strong emotional reaction that could only pertain to experiencing these memories herself: that these memories belong to her.

The movie never seems to take a reflective stance over whether Stelline is a replicant or human, leaving an open invitation for the viewer to create their theories, which is another reference to the implied reader, or the implied viewer, and indeterminate meaning. As such, the storyline of the film points towards Stelline being a human: even though she is born of a replicant, she still ages, which is a contrast to *Detroit*'s Alice, who is created as a child, and she was technically never born. However, there is never any indication that an android in *Detroit* will ever age: an android child will always remain a child and is commercialized in a magazine that can be found around the in-game city, echoing Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* with the title "The Three Laws of Robotic Parenting – Family Life Has Never Been Easier…":

> *When CyberLife initially released their child range, the public was skeptical of purchasing a "family." Now, the collection is one of CyberLife's bestsellers, but is this really a surprise?*
>
> *Customizable, removable LED, no hunger, no expensive children, no new clothes and not to mention, no smelly diapers! The perfect child is only a click away. All its needs can be suspended at the touch of a button… It's child's play. It's the stress-free solution for career-orientated parents, those struggling to have their own children or miss having a youngster at home.*
>
> *With unemployment at 37.3%, $7,500 for a child that avoids the dreaded teenage years and shelling out for college, seems like a wise investment compared to $350,000 over 17 years. Plus, it doesn't have a life-long commitment.*
>
> *But Sociologist Mary Wallace argues that "these androids are leading fewer parents to have children at a time when our birthrates are already far too low," contributing to what she terms "the baby doom."*
>
> *Jason Graff, director of humanization of CyberLife, dismisses these claims as "the usual resistance to new ideas," calling these new androids "a triumph of humanization design* (*Detroit: Become Human*).

Again, corporate thinking leads the people in this fictional universe to believe that replacing a child with a product is not only accepted, but also that they contribute to cease the progress of humanity. From a game player's perspective, Alice in *Detroit* becomes a symbol of the emotional connection between the player and the game. Comparably, *2049* creates a

compelling argument for the film viewer that because Stelline is a woman born of a replicant, she represents a justification of the replicant's hope of a revolution.

In conclusion, the women in the *Blade Runner* universe are portrayed as sexualized objects. *Detroit,* on the other hand, portrays gender in a fairly equal fashion, as each of the protagonists might be reversed in terms of gender without altering the significance of the story. As a part of establishing the relationship between the media and the audience, the two universes also challenge the traditional and romanticized image of childhood, by portraying Alice and Ana Stelline in the image of the traumatized child. Looking at this from a contemporary standpoint, these children might seem more relatable because of their imperfect childhood: by falsifying the romanticized image of childhood, it is a more honest interpretation of childhood than frequently represented in media. This way, the relationship between the audience and the media is established, making the fictional world more relatable.

3.2 Corporate Creations, Surveillance and Control – The Verge of an Android Revolution:

The vision of creating something new is often with the intent of being beneficial for humankind, and it is a plotline in fiction that has been used for over 200 years. The storyline regarding the creation of something unknown is most famously recounted in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Believing it to be a breakthrough in science, Dr. Frankenstein creates a creature made of human body parts. When the creature is brought to life, it gains an individual consciousness, to Frankenstein's great horror. During the novel, the creature demands to learn who and what it is, whatever the cost. Looking at the *Blade Runner* universe, and *Detroit: Become Human*, they offer a futuristic interpretation of this classic literary work.

Melley argues that the most astonishing feature of the Tyrell Corporation is that Mr. Tyrell is a "singular 'genius' and inventor-hero in the Henry Ford mold" (Melley 190). With a vision to create a more functional life for human beings with the help of replicants, Tyrell has acquired an interesting view on life: "The facts of life. To make an alteration in the evolvement of an organic life system is fatal. A coding sequence cannot be revised once it's been established" (*Blade Runner,* Scott). This description explains how Tyrell might see the replicants as equal to human beings, each life valued in the form of a coding sequence: in other words, humans are mysterious machines that can be solved through decoding.

Correspondingly, the creator of the replicants in *Blade Runner 2049* is Niander Wallace and his Wallace Corporation. Putting himself in the role of a god, he believes that his creations are 'angels,' and through procreation, Wallace believes he can populate Earth with his replicants:

> We make angels in the service of civilizations. Every leap of civilization was built off the back of a disposable workforce. We lost our stomach for slaves, unless engineered. We could storm Eden and retake her. Tyrell's final trick: procreation. Perfected, then lost (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve).

With a vision of creating replicants that can reproduce, he also firmly believes his replicants will always obey. To prove this fact, he orders a replicant to kill itself: "My replicants will only live as long or as short as a customer will pay. My replicants will never rebel. They will never run. They will simply obey" (*2036: Nexus Dawn*, Scott). This naïve way of thinking seems to be a common denominator for all the creators, as they consciously construct highly advanced technology without knowing the repercussions of implementing such a product into society. Having a rather dysfunctional perspective of the earth and humans, Wallace surrounds himself only with his replicants and technology: "Humanity has only survived this long by crushing the earth to suit its needs…" (*2036: Nexus Dawn* Short, Scott). With a clear reference to *Frankenstein*, Wallace comments on the 'birth' of a new replicant: "the first thought one tends to fear, to preserve the clay. It's fascinating. Before we even know what we are, we fear to lose it" (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve). Similar to Wallace, Elijah Kamski in *Detroit* also put himself in the role of a god, with a clear vision to create a new race of technology he believes will benefit humanity. Even though he created CyberLife, Kamski exited the corporation for unknown reasons, and now lives in isolation with his androids. However, Elijah Kamski and his product of high technology androids can be argued to take part in a broader conspiracy theory. During the investigation of the deviants, Hank and Connor visit Kamski to learn what he might know about why these androids can break through their predetermined program, upon which he says:

> Deviants… Fascinating, aren't they? Perfect beings with infinite intelligence, and now they have free will. Machines are so superior to us, confrontation is inevitable. Humanity's greatest achievement threatens to be its downfall. Isn't it ironic? (*Detroit: Become Human*)

Kamski bears a mysterious yet paranoid aura as he carries much more knowledge about his creations than he reveals, creating the theory that he might be deliberately creating androids with susceptibility to deviancy. Similar to the Tyrell and Wallace Corporation, Kamski's CyberLife aims to make androids a commodity – and when these machines then become

deviants, it complicates the entire social structure. When Kamski is confronted with this issue by Connor and Hank, he consciously avoids the question:

> Connor: [optional answer] We need to understand how androids become deviants. Do you know anything that could help us?
>
> Elijah Kamski: All ideas are viruses that spread like epidemics. Is the desire to be free a contagious disease?
>
> Hank: Listen, I didn't come here to talk philosophy. The machines you created may be planning a revolution. Either you can tell us something that'll be helpful, or we will be on our way.

When Hank and Connor exit Kamski's house, he remarks: "Oh, by the way… I always leave an emergency exit in my programs. You never know" (*Detroit: Become Human*). He says this while facing the camera to talk directly to the player, evidently breaking the 4th wall to communicate both with the player as well as the characters within the fictional world. This evokes the theory of the implied reader, or in this case, the implied gamer. Kamski's hint about consciously creating androids prone to deviancy, suggests to the players that he is fully aware of creating androids that can discover a way to break through their program without the assistance of a human being. As such, he becomes a critical element in a perfect conspiracy theory: Leaving the corporation that he created, secluding himself from the rest of humanity, while knowingly creating androids with an emergency exit program. In addition, Kamski creates Markus, the androids that lead their revolution, as a personal gift for Carl. Kamski's comment might hint at his true intentions: consciously creating a technological 'race' that he knows will stop obeying their masters at a certain point, perhaps his intentions are not at all to do what is best for humanity – perhaps it is to challenge humanity itself.

From a cultural critic's perspective, committing to "transforming any social order which exploits people on the grounds of race, class, and gender," are all issues worth considering in the analysis of contemporary works (Templeton 20). In one instance of *Detroit*, Carl's son Leo arrives for an unannounced visit. The situation escalates as Leo's drug addiction makes him beg his father for money, and turns his rage and jealousy towards Markus: "You'd rather take care of your plastic toy here than your own son, eh? Tell me, dad, what's it got that I don't?" (*Detroit: Become Human*). The police arrive at the house, and Markus gets shot, mistaken for being the aggressor when he was, in reality, the protector. Considering the fact that Markus is a 'black' android, this instance seems to become reminiscent of contemporary discussion of police brutality in the United States. After being

shot, he is destroyed and sent to a junkyard – and awakens in what looks like a graveyard of demolished and malfunctioning androids. With several parts of himself damaged, Markus crawls his way through the area to scan other androids for functioning parts to replace his own. Another dilemma arises: Will the player take into consideration that a machine expresses fear of death? The player is faced with dilemmas such as taking components from androids that are still alive and begs for mercy. The player is given the option to spare the androids or to murder them.

3.3 The Connection Between Social Class and Empathy.

Detroit renders different aspects of social class: Todd represents the lower class, as he lives in the impoverished part of Detroit. As a poverty-stricken citizen, Todd still possesses two androids in addition to buying addictive drugs. In this instance, having two androids in his home might be a way for him to feel superior, as he mistreats the androids because he feels inferior outside of his own home. Ultimately Todd treats the androids as machines with no feelings or individual thoughts. As a contrast, Carl and Markus are on the opposite side of Todd in terms of social structure, residing in the wealthy part of Detroit. Between Carl and Markus, the natural hierarchy between human and machine becomes blurred. As part of this wealth, Carl encourages Markus to read, play chess, and play the piano, which challenges the game player with the discussion of machines being capable of possessing creative impulses. There is one scene in particular, where Markus is challenged by Carl to create a painting. At first, the player is given the option to have Markus paint something in the room. Carl answers:

> Carl: That is a perfect copy of reality. But painting is not about replicating the world, it's about interpreting it, improving on it, showing something *you* see.
> Markus: Carl, I don't think I can do that. It's not in my program (*Detroit: Become Human*).

With Carl's persistence, Markus does what he is told with some guidance from Carl: "try to imagine something that doesn't exist. Something you've never seen. Concentrate on how it makes you feel and let your hand drift across the canvas" (*Detroit: Become Human*). The player can then choose between several different themes that shape the final product, as the painting changes accordingly. The idea of an android possessing this kind of creativity is a frightening, yet intriguing thought, as many would argue that art requires imagination and interpretation. Can artificial intelligence possess creativity? To relate this to real-life, there

has been increasing debate on whether artificial consciousness will be able to create music that is similar to music produced by a human being: "Qualities and traits held to be 'human' – creative intelligence, the capacity for love and other emotions, humor, irony, benevolence and the consciousness of morality, the lack of a human body seemed to reaffirm our confidence in their non-human nature" (Williams 388). The argument of an artificial consciousness is interesting because most people consider music to be directly connected to one's emotions. As such, there have been several instances that prove how people are not able to hear the difference between music made by a machine and music made by a human being.[14] Besides giving Markus his artistic freedom, Carl shows his belief in androids being superior to human beings in several instances: In one instance, when Markus is on his way home from an errand, he is attacked by human demonstrators on the street who is accusing androids of taking their jobs:

> Carl: Humans are such a fragile machine. They break down so quickly. All this effort to keep 'em going… Hey. What happened to your clothes?
>
> Markus: Oh, nothing. Just some demonstrators in the street, Carl.
>
> Carl: What a bunch of idiots. They think they can stop progress by roughing up a few androids? (*Detroit: Become Human*)

Whereas Carl and Todd represent two different sides of the economic scale, possessing an android seems not only to benefit their everyday life, but it also accentuates their social status. One could perhaps argue that the way the humans treat their androids is dependent on social class, yet there is a reason to believe that this is not the case: rather, it is a matter of ethical principles and their capacity for empathy. The issue of androids being able to bear empathy is an instance that Connor in *Detroit: Become Human* will experience intimately: brutally challenged by Kamski, he pulls out a gun and provokes Connor to kill another android, which is Chloe:

> Kamski: I'm sure you're familiar with the Turing Test. Mere formality… simple question of algorithms and computing capacity. What interests me, is whether machines are capable of empathy. I call it "the Kamski test," it's very simple, you'll see… [Gestures towards Chloe] Magnificent, isn't it? One of the first intelligent models developed by CyberLife. Young and beautiful forever. A flower that will never whither. But what is it, really? A piece of plastic imitating a human? Or a living being, with a soul? [pulls out a gun, and gestures Chloe to get on her knees, and walks up to Connor to give him the gun] It's up to you to answer that fascinating question,

[14] https://www.electronicbeats.net/war-against-the-machines-how-ai-is-changing-the-way-we-make-music/

> Connor. Destroy this machine, and I'll tell you all I know. Or spare it, if you feel it's alive.
>
> [Player's optional choice: Refuse to shoot Chloe]
>
> Kamski: Fascinating. CyberLife's last chance to save humanity, is itself a deviant.
>
> Connor: I'm… I'm not a deviant.
>
> Kamski: You preferred to spare a machine rather than accomplish your mission. You saw a living being in this android. You showed empathy. A war is coming… you'll have to choose your side. Will you betray your own people, or will you stand up against your creators? What could be worse than having to choose between two evils? (*Detroit: Become Human*)

While communicating with the protagonist, Kamski also invites the player to consider the same questions, affecting the choices the player might take in the future. This leads to an interesting comparison of the different empathy tests in *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner* universe. Voigt-Kampff, the Baseline test, the Turing test, and the Kamski test, are all designed to confront intelligent machines with their ability to carry empathy. After retiring the replicant Sapper Morton in *Blade Runner 2049*, K has to return to the police station to perform a so-called post-traumatic Baseline test: a test designed to analyze his mental state, identifying errors and other hints that might reveal him as a rebellious replicant or if he can maintain his programmed self:

> And blood-black nothingness began to spin. A system of cells interlinked within cells interlinked within cells interlinked within one stem. And dreadfully distinct against the dark, a tall white fountain played (*Blade Runner 2049*, Denis Villeneuve).

K's behavior changes throughout the film, as he in the beginning seems unaffected by the test. However, the second time the test is taken, K approaches the test differently because of the experiences he has acquired: discovering that there exists a replicant child, that his memories are not originally his own, and that his artificial relationship with Joi will never fulfill his real desires. The change in K's behavior when taking the test is reflected in the way the camera-angle changes both times the test is taken during the movie. On the first test, the frame is shot from behind, looking over K's shoulder and at the device where the voice performing the test originates from. On the second test, the frame is shot from the front, showing K's face so they can look at how his face changes as the questions are being asked, enforcing his emotional development throughout the film.

Similarly, Connor's ability to carry empathy grows throughout *Detroit*, and he resembles K as a character because they are both androids who attempt to chase down their

own kind. Connor is analytical in thought and mechanical in behavior up until he discovers, through his investigation of the deviants, that there is something more to his kind – that he can be like other human beings. Because of this, Connor is arguably the protagonist in the game that experiences the most drastic change in character. His storyline begins in a neo-noir detective genre, solving crimes and bringing the criminals to justice: the only difference is that the criminals are deviant androids and that the detective possess superhuman analytic skills. Partnered together with Hank, one of the few human characters the player establishes a relationship with, their mission is to discover why androids are turning into deviants, as well as chasing them down so they can be disassembled. Deckard says in *Blade Runner* that "replicants weren't supposed to have feelings. Neither did Blade Runners" (*Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott). As such, the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit*'s emphasis on these tests functions as a distraction from the humans, who seem to carry the same problem: not being able to feel and express empathy and emotion. Thus, the main goal of these tests is to detect whether a machine can pass as a human being.

In terms of social class, the scene of the android compartment is just one of many scenarios in which the player can encounter the 'racial' hierarchy between androids and humans. In the introductory chapter of this thesis, Connor is described as he tries to solve a case where the android of the household has murdered a man and taken their daughter hostage. By searching the apartment, finding clues, and recreating the events, the player finds out that the android, named Daniel, was being replaced and that that is why this situation is taking place. Daniel's case is the game's first instance where an android has taken a human life, where a machine consciousness has displayed signs of emotion and individual thought. The player is thrown into several moral questions of machine consciousness as human consciousness.

During the hostage situation, Connor tries to calm Daniel down: "these emotions you are feeling are just errors in your software," whereas Daniel answers: "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*). These feelings that Daniel has begun to explore is reflected in the *Blade Runner* universe as well, such as in the first film where Roy, one of the rebellious Nexus-6 replicants, expresses this in one of the last scenes between him and Rick Deckard, where they are fighting each other until one of them dies. Before the turn-around, Roy gets the upper-hand over Deckard, and says: "Quite an experience to live in fear,

isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave" (*Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott). Echoing Rosenblatt's reader-response notion of language, "it is often forgotten that language is always internalized by an individual human being in transaction with a particular environment" (3). In this instance, the term 'slave' seems to be embedded into the androids' speech, as their choice of words reflect human history.

3.4 Surveillance, and the Constant Desire for Control:

In the early stages of *Detroit*, Connor follows his predetermined program and answers to his higher-in-command Amanda. Whenever he has gathered more information about the deviants, he enters a garden; serenity embodied in a pond with a gazebo, flowers everywhere and no sounds except for birds chirping and the soft breeze of the wind. In other words, he enters a simulation where they can speak in private. Believing in a one-way free flow of information, Connor is constantly surveilled by Amanda, who demands a continuous update on his progression in solving the deviant case. As part of the general function in the game, the protagonists the player embodies can all die throughout the game. However, because they are androids, another one in the same model takes over. If during a series of choices during the opening scene of the game leads to Connor's death, he is replaced by a duplicate in the next chapter, explained as the following upon meeting his chief Amanda:

> Connor: Hello, Amanda.
>
> Amanda: Connor, it's good to see you. Your predecessor was unfortunately destroyed… It knew deviants could be unpredictable, but it wasn't careful enough. I hope you won't make the same mistake.
>
> Connor: I don't intend to.
>
> Amanda: When a Connor model is destroyed, its memory is transferred to the next one… but some data can be lost in the process. Avoid being destroyed. It will be better for you and the investigation.

Again, the fourth wall is broken here, as Amanda makes a comment on how the player should play the game. Because of Connor's nature, the fact that he is designed not to lie, evidently shows that the truth is always expected of him. However, like the other protagonists, Connor may choose to deviate from this path, a choice that becomes increasingly tempting as Amanda's authoritative positions are strongly reminiscent to Foucault's theory of the Panopticon; the all-seeing eye that is made to keep constant surveillance on citizens, or in this

case, the androids: "Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere" (Foucault 195).

Amanda is not only the representation of the gaze, but also supports the previously mentioned hierarchy among the androids as well, both the pre-programmed androids and the deviants. Later in the game, the player will discover that Amanda is a replica of Elijah Kamski's mentor, who died a decade ago. In other words, Amanda is an android herself, which shatters the illusion of her being a representative of human authority. Depending on how the player plays the game, Connor's attitude towards authority will change, which does not go without notice. Assessing her control over Connor, Amanda threatens to "terminate him" if he does not follow orders (*Detroit: Become Human*). As the supervisor, Amanda further emphasizes the hierarchy that is being shaped amongst androids.

Amanda and Lieutenant Joshi's goal is to maintain the established order of society, which is to deny the android revolution from taking place. In *2049,* K discovers remains of a body that is buried in Sapper Morton's garden. Numbers are imprinted on parts of the skeleton, revealing the body is Rachael, Rick Deckard's forbidden love, and that she was pregnant. When this fact is revealed to Lieutenant Joshi, K is ordered to find the child, and 'retire' it: "the world is built in a wall that separates kind. Tell either side there's no wall, you've brought a war. Or a slaughter" (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve). Trying desperately to contain order, Joshi does everything in her power not to let any information about a new revolutionary phenomenon reach out to the public, or get into the 'wrong' hands, such as the Wallace corporation, which have their own opinion on how contain social order.

Luv is another authoritative female figure that resembles Amanda and Joshi, whom establishes an intricate line between fulfilling the perfect android fantasy and the realization of being a sentient creature. When Wallace discovers the existence of a replicant child, Luv is sent out to gather information, which ends with executing Lieutenant Joshi, saying: "You tiny thing. In the face of the fabulous new your only thought is to kill it? For fear of great change?" (*Blade Runner 2049*, Villeneuve). This fear is reflected on several occasions in *Detroit: Become Human* and *Blade Runner 2049* in the form of surveillance through gaze and screens. Timothy Melley points out that the transference of power from autocrats to discourses and institutions began long ago, describing how the futurism of productions such as *Blade Runner* masks that fact:

> After a close-up of an eyeball, in which the skyline is reflected, we are presented with a shot of the city, which takes us toward the towering edifice of the Tyrell building, an immense pyramid with a flat top. The more visual reference here is to the Great Seal of the United States, which appears on the back of U.S. paper currency (Melley 191).

Melley's observation of the Tyrell building and the Great Seal of the United States is one of several conscious connections made by the producers of *Blade Runner* to underline the topical issues such as surveillance: The films' use of the eyes resembles the notion of the panopticon. According to Arostegui, this symbolism is significant for the "hermeneutic code of the film" (24), as the observation of the eyes becomes a way replicants are revealed. Emphasizing the power and control of the social structure, the empathy tests blend major motifs of *Blade Runner*, such as the eye and screen which "usually appears as a frame for sight" (25).

The eyes play a vital part in the Voigt-Kampff test to identify a replicant – where a human's pupils would dilate where emotions are evoked, a replicant's eyes would remain still. Comparably, in *Blade Runner 2049*, the only way of establishing that someone is a replicant, is a production tag implanted in the bottom of their right eye. In one scene, Luv guards over K through a pair of glasses, surveilling him as he gets attacked by raiders and protects him by dropping down bombs on them, ultimately gaining control over the situation without K being aware of it. In this instance, androids have been separated from humans by differentiating their capability for empathy and general emotion.

The symbol of the eye in the *Blade Runner* franchise and *Detroit: Become Human* is a means of projecting emotion and empathy. The only way to recognize a replicant is to administer a psychological test while monitoring the subject's *eye*-movements – "a combination of techniques that were, not coincidentally, widely used by corporations in the 1950s" (Melley 191). In *Detroit*, the only way to spot an android is the device they have on their temple in the shape of a circle, that changes colors indicative of their current emotion. It flashes red when it is being threatened, yellow when processing information, and blue when neutral. What is interesting this tracker is placed beside the androids' eyes, making the player's attention being drawn automatically to them. When this device is removed, there is no longer a way of telling the difference between a human and an android, creating a more realistic emotional mirroring of human beings.

The means of identifying the androids through the eyes, is an ironic touch to the fictional world of *Detroit* and *Blade Runner 2049*, as the eyes are an essential empathic and emotional asset to the human being. Comparably, the opening scene of *Blade Runner 2049*

also includes the metaphor of the eye, bearing a close resemblance to the opening scene of the first movie, *Blade Runner*: An overlook of the city, following a close-up shot of an eye, and something happening in the reflection of the eye. All in all, these two universes portray a technology so advanced that it has become indistinguishable from humans, it seems relevant and natural that this is the way they would be able to distinguish technology from humans.

This awareness that the replicants might possess the ability to be empathic is an ongoing scenario throughout the *Blade Runner*-franchise and *Detroit*, and is shown not only through the empathy tests, but also through their eyes. In *Blade Runner*, the Voigt-Kampff test is "designed to provoke an emotional response" and registering any "capillary dilation of the eye, fluctuation of the pupil, involuntary dilation of the iris." The replicants are explained by Deckard's boss Bryant, "designed to copy human beings in every way except their emotions. The designers reckoned after a few years they might develop their own emotional responses" (*Blade Runner,* Scott). Even though the film's replicants fail the empathy test, "they nevertheless manifest an equal claim to occupy the emotional Real" (McNamara 440). In other words, though they are machines, the replicants' emotional presence resembles those of the human individual. In a postindustrial society, where humans feel a fundamental disconnect from and fragmentation of life, their need to feel emotion becomes so dire that they resolve to desperate measures.

In Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the only way for humans to express emotions and to connect with another human being, is through an empathy box: which gives them their desired emotion on command. There is a constant struggle for humans feel empathy, and to solve this, they have established a culture for possessing artificial animals. If someone does not own an animal, "they'll look down on you […] You know how people are talking about not taking care of an animal; they consider it immoral and anti-empathic" (Dick 10). Ultimately, this postindustrial desire for connecting emotionally to another human being is reflected through owning an animal and an empathy box: and possessing these things turns into an obsession for these humans.

Another obsession that is prominent in *Detroit*, are drugs, which seem to be a running theme in the game. Red Ice is encountered closely with the detective Hank, who suffers from alcoholism and has suicidal tendencies: in one scene, Connor finds Hank lying on the floor in his kitchen, with a bottle of alcohol in one hand and a loaded gun in the other, playing a single-person Russian Roulette. However, there is a reason for this behavior: throughout the

movie, Hank's hatred towards androids is combined with his alcoholism because of his deceased son, Cole. After a car accident, Cole needed an operation to survive. Thus, the human doctor was unable to perform surgery on the boy because he was high on Red Ice, *Detroit*'s commodity drug. Therefore, an android had to take its place and perform the surgery instead. Cole did not survive in the hands of the android, and that is why Hank despises them. However, this might change throughout the game, as Hank reverses his perspective, channeling his rage on humans instead:

> Connor: His name was Cole. And he just turned six at the time of the accident. It wasn't your fault, lieutenant. A truck skidded on a sheet of ice and your car rolled over. Cole needed emergency surgery, but no human was available to do it. So, an android had to take care of him. Cole didn't make it. That's why you hate androids. You think one of us is responsible for your son's death.
>
> Hank: Cole died because a human surgeon was too high on Red Ice to operate. He was the one that took my son from me. Him and this world, where the only way people can find comfort is with a fistful of powder (*Detroit: Become Human*).

Addictive drugs like Red Ice is shown consuming humans throughout the story. The previous quote can be found toward the end of the game, when Hank's view on androids have changed: placing the blame on how humans "can find comfort with a fistful of powder." In other words, while humans believe that drug abuse is a way for them to feel emotion, it robs them of their humanity instead.

Hank chases the deviants on a macro-level – the city's android population is increasingly becoming deviants, and he is on a time limit before they have all become deviants. As his perception of androids changes, Hank acknowledges Connor's humanity even when Connor himself is uncertain of his deviancy, turning into his moral compass. In a way, this machine has given agency back to the human. By evoking Jakob Lothe's notion of the *thematic component*, which focuses on character development, Hank can be compared to Rick Deckard in *Blade Runner*. They both despise androids in the beginning, but after being proven otherwise in a series of events, have a change of mind. Deckard and Hank's job descriptions resemble each other, as they both work for different American police departments, Los Angeles and Detroit respectively – they are assigned the task to hunt down rebellious replicants – or deviant androids. However, where Deckard is asked to 'retire them,' Hank is, on the other hand, asked to bring them in for questioning and to disassemble them to figure out why they have become deviants, offering a more humane attitude towards androids.

Unlike Deckard and K from the *Blade Runner* universe, Hank from *Detroit* is not the protagonist. Still, he is a prominent character that sets the humans' point of view in perspective, and displays an interpretation of the humans' attitude towards androids. Considering Hank's character development, he seems to ultimately gain an emotional understanding of the androids on a deeper level than the two protagonists from the *Blade Runner* universe is ever able to. From a production standpoint, Hank's attitude might be different because *Detroit*'s story is created in a real-life society where technology is a more prominent element than it was over 30 years ago. When *Do Androids Dream?* and *Blade Runner* were created, people seemed to have a different view on intelligent technology than they do when creating *Detroit* and *Blade Runner 2049*.

Nonetheless, Hank learns about the androids' humanity and learns to view and treat them as equals. In contrast, Deckard in the *Blade Runner*-universe reflects the political resentment "practiced by millions of Americans who are profoundly alienated from political institutions, which they regard as a ruse of power, not a source of power and site of its negotiation" (McNamara 431). Thus, Deckard relates to the postmodern man in that he is "dehumanized by tracking down androids" (434), and feels pulled away from his agency by technology. Hank's agency, on the other hand, is brought back to him by his interactions with the androids.

In conclusion, this chapter has been discussing the importance of the avatar. The avatar serves as a connection point between the player is to achieve spatial presence and immersion. Both *Detroit* and the *Blade Runner*-universe answers the question of "who am I, really?" to "whomever you want to be." Stories such as the ones in this thesis may offer a different perspective on familiar situations, bringing about an unsettling effect called "defamiliarization." This is defined as an effect that disrupts our "habitual perception of the world, enabling us to 'see' things afresh […] art exists in order to recover for us the sensation of life which is diminished in the 'automatized' routine of everyday experience" (Oxford, "Defamiliarization"). Both the *Blade Runner*-universe and *Detroit: Become Human* tries to challenge the notion of defamiliarization by disrupting and challenging the audience's way of perceiving machine consciousness through flow and immersion as they are pulled into a world that might challenge some of their conceptions of the world and its functions.

3.5 Androids and Humanity.

As a solution to the crises of modernity, there is a "possibility of alienation and the restoration of a natural basis for individual life and social order" (McNamara 423). The androids' struggle to achieve the status as an individual. They desperately thrive to find the core of humanity, what makes them able to pass as human individuals. What *Detroit: Become Human* and the *Blade Runner* universe have in common, is that they portray this core as emotion. Being able to possess emotion is valued highly by both humans and androids in these postindustrial societies. For instance, when K is confronted about retiring the child, he shows hesitance towards executing something that has a soul:

> K: I've never retired something that was born before.
>
> Lieutenant Joshi: What's the difference?
>
> K: To be born is to have a soul, I guess (*Blade Runner 2049,* Villeneuve).

Hesitant about performing his task, K decides to generate his very first lie to defy Joshi's orders. He makes up a lie about having found and retired the child, burying any evidence with it, he has, on the other hand, taken matters into his own hands, trying to find out more about this child. Believing he has some memories implanted in his mind that can be related to the replicant child, K visits the Wallace Corporation, who has stored information regarding older versions of replicants, where the fragments in the vault resemble eyeballs. K's memories.

> Lieutenant Joshi: I've known a lot of your kind. All useful, but with you I sometimes forget. We didn't have any of you where I was a kid. Do you remember anything? Before you were under me, you have any memories from before?
>
> K: I have memories, but they're not real. They're just implants. I feel strange sharing a childhood story, considering I was never a child (*Blade Runner 2049,* Denis Villeneuve).

In *Detroit: Become Human,* the reason to make the androids humanlike is stated in one of the magazines scattered around the city of Detroit, titled "The Secrets of Androids – How CyberLife Designs Its Androids to Coexist with Humans," they explain how they worked to make the androids look as human as possible:

> *They created androids of both genders and all ethnicities, analyzing thousands of voices to find the most pleasing tones. Realistic blinking was perfected – though totally unnecessary – along with breathing, facial hair, and many other humanizing*

> *traits. This perfect simulation of humanity, down to details that androids simply don't need, is the secret of CyberLife's design success* (*Detroit: Become Human*)

As such, the androids and replicants are created to look and simulate human beings because the creators thought that humans would be more comfortable with having an intelligent machine consciousness in the house or so integrated into their everyday lives. However, in *2049* and *Detroit*, it seems to have the opposite effect. People are more disturbed by the fact that they look so humanlike than to feel comfortable with it. I believe there are two reasons for why *Detroit: Become Human* made the replicants so humanlike. The first is the reason previously mentioned. The other one is that since they are the protagonists, the player can more easily relate to someone that looks human, than if they would be controlling something was made out of metal. Besides, it is somehow more natural for the player to convey empathy when the recipient looks human and has human traits.

The catalyst for the replicants' independence movement is the plot-twist of *2049* upon the realization that K's implanted memories belong to Stelline, the daughter of a replicant. Believing that he was the replicant this, the reveal is the only instance in the film where K seem to display genuine emotion. However, the fact that the memories are Stelline's is not revealed until later and seems to be a conspiracy theory equal to Kamski's in consciously planting a way for the androids to become deviants. It seems that Stelline's memories are indeed knowingly planted into K's mind like Jericho is planted into the androids of *Detroit*: as a step into further realizing an android revolution.

In one scene, K has to visit an orphanage to gather more information about the unknown replicant child. As he enters a wasteland, his technology malfunctions and he crash into pile of debris, leaving a cloud of rust behind him. This is the same scene as where K is surveilled by Luv, who saves him from the attack of raiders. The orphanage's location and the children residing there also seem to symbolize the waste that is consuming the city, as they seem to be referred to as a consumer product to be used and then thrown away. Having an orphanage near such a polluted and abandoned area seems to give the children the symbol of only being a source of labor only to be used and thrown away, similar to the debris they reside in. As K enters the orphanage, he is led through a dark hall where all of the other children are working endlessly and being punished for making mistakes. Again, the trope of slavery arises as the children are aligned with the replicants in terms of social status. This continuous demonization of androids and discarding humans that are considered worthless, the notion of

freedom is deflected by the corporate society that thrives on the manufacturing of products – threatening society in ways that justify the creation of a repressive system.

Where the androids of *Detroit* do not age, the replicants differ in lifespan: In *Blade Runner*, they are designed to live four years as a fail-safe to not be able to develop emotional responses. In *Blade Runner 2049*, however, the lifespan of the replicants are decided by those who buy them. This is perhaps a way of underlining the hierarchy between human and machine, but there is one question that arises: what happens when these designs do not go as planned?

In conclusion, *Detroit: Become Human*, and the *Blade Runner* universe is interesting works for comparing and contrasting, dealing with issues such as the feminine/masculine in a society, and the real-life cities versus their fictional representations. In addition, the two previous chapters on environmental storytelling and chapter analysis have explored the social discussions represented in the respective works, such as machine consciousness as opposed to human consciousness, the class struggle represented in the android/human metaphor, and the social repercussions created by integrating advanced technology into society.

More Human Than Humans – A Conclusion.

It is not always easy to defend video games in a socio-critical discussion. There have been several encounters where the conversation has been stopped by arguments such as "I don't believe video games will ever be a positive contribution to society. My children spend much more time on a digital screen than I ever did when I was young," or "I've only seen people become violent from playing video games. Having a positive impact on players? Never." Indeed, these arguments are difficult to argue against: The younger generations are spending more time on a digital screen now than ever before, and specific violent episodes have connected the perpetrator to their interest in particular violent video games. Various research has been done to both supports and denies these assumptions. Either way, games are first and foremost a medium used for entertainment and are supposed to be associated with fun.

Moreover, they will, most probably, still be used mainly for entertainment purposes over the coming decades. With this thesis, I hope to have proven that video games can be much more than games of violence or children's play. Rather, they can be essential additions to society, daring to express what other media cannot. For instance, *Detroit: Become Human* choose to portray humans as mechanical and emotionless. They have ultimately lost their sense of humanity, and are introduced to machines that serve as a guide to how they can regain it. In a way, the androids have become 'more human than humans.' By comparing and contrasting *Detroit: Become Human* with selected works from the *Blade Runner* universe, I have explored what film and video games have in common, and how they establish a relationship with the audience that can be based on emotion.

In the first chapter, I introduced different ludic, film, and literary theories that are frequently used in the respective research fields. Psychological elements such as immersion, flow, and experientiality were used to explain the connection between the game and the player. While immersion and flow can also be found in literature and film, these psychological elements have proven to be much more profound in video games. Film theories such as story and character have been introduced for the reader to bring into the discussion of character analysis and environmental storytelling. To explain how the story and the characters are vital to the media, the film theories and literary theories together become useful to understand the impact that characters and the environment might have on its audience. To better understand the environment in which these stories are told, it is important to look at the

genres: neo-noir thriller, science fiction, and cyberpunk. These genres all contain the power to radically express socio-critical issues, and has been shown in the case-study of *Detroit: Become Human* and the *Blade Runner* universe. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that reaching the ultimate free-flowing story in a game where the player can design their very own story, is a bar too high to reach. Even though game developers promise to give the player a world where they can design their own stories, they will still be limited to the extent within their predesigned walls. However, some games still seem to give off the illusion that the player is in full control, which seems enough for now.

In the second chapter, I engaged in a discussion of the environmental storytelling elements in the respective works. Through looking at the different elements found in the scenery of the fictional worlds, they give the audience plenty of environmental storytelling that can contribute to expressing an opinion that would not otherwise be expressed vocally. However, environmental storytelling offers an interesting aspect: it can be ignored, or it might be overlooked, omitting elements from the story that contributes to a more vivid, fictional universe. The literary criticism of transactional reader-response gives the audience freedom to interpret the universe they are shown. By applying the theory of Flow, one can more easily explore and understand how games can provoke emotional reactions from the players, and how they might form powerful attachments to the characters and the milieu. This is also the case for film. Even though the narrative-heavy games have, here, been analyzed through traditional narrative theories, games are anything but traditional: they offer a fluid, ambiguous, and interactive storytelling unlike any other media and breaks with several traditional holding points of narratology.

In the third chapter, I did a character analysis of the relevant characters from both universes, comparing and contrasting them to shine a light on how they are able to establish a relationship with their audience. The discussion of female characters such as Kara and Chloe from *Detroit*, and the portrayal of female characters compared to Rachael, Luv, and Joi from the *Blade Runner* universe, all contribute to the feminist discussion that is so prominent in contemporary society. In terms of gender being equally portrayed in popular entertainment media such as film and video games, they still have some way to go but have seen much improvement in the last few years, such as women being portrayed in an increasingly nuanced way. The selected female characters in this thesis are a representation of these nuances: Rachael and Luv as the femme fatale, Chloe and Joi as the objectified, sexualized woman, and

Kara as the version of a Stepford Wife, yet also a strong female protagonist. Further emphasizing how the relationship between the audience is strengthened through the different personae, the chapter discussed the significance of child characters. Alice and Ana Stelline explore the effects of child characters in fiction and how they evoke a feeling of emotion within the audience.

Ultimately, they break with the romanticized image of the innocent child, offering a more realistic rendering of childhood. On the other hand, Hank, Connor, and Markus from *Detroit* and Deckard and K from the *Blade Runner* universe are male characters that represent the different aspects of a male-dominated society. These specific conditions have been the discussion of male-dominated jobs, prostitution and sexually commodified objects, and the imbalance of female and male characters in the respective fictional universes. The *Blade Runner* universe seems to portray the notion of the patriarchal society to a greater extent than *Detroit*, as it has an even stronger notion of the male-dominated society. Finally, the chapter also explored the creators that spark the change in their respective fictional universes: Kamski, Tyrell, and Wallace. They evoke the Frankenstein-complex in that they create something in the belief of doing something good for humanity, without reflecting on possible repercussions on society.

In the end, it may all come down to empathy and emotion. The key to both the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit: Become Human*, is empathy, the primary emotion for how they differentiate between human and machine. It does not come down to appearance, but their behavior and their actions. The androids have become obsessed with becoming human. Something artificial being able to produce thoughts and reflections about the world around them. The exciting element that both the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit: Become Human* implement, is that they portray these intelligent machines as humanlike. Instead, they go so far as to make them indistinguishable from humans. Similarly, *Blade Runner* also creates replicants with the vision of having them look exactly like humans. I have emphasized the importance of the relationship between the player and the game, and how some games are well on the way of being an essential part of a socio-political discussion. I like to believe that the future of video game research will include the title 'socio-cultural game studies.' When studying games, many have only researched how games have an impact on a particular group of people. In my opinion, future research on video games should, therefore, include as

relevant media for socio-critical analysis, and explore how they make an impact on the society around us.

What is next? Ludologists have spent decades establishing video game theory – but it has not been used for much more than that. Most game research concerns the video game itself, as a technological phenomenon, and not what the games contain, as well as the socio-critical meanings of its content. In addition, these works have paid tribute to traditional science fiction works by including extratextual references from Isaac Asimov, Philip K. Dick, and Ira Levin. Like *Blade Runner*, *Detroit: Become Human* deals with topics such as racial discrimination, human vs. machine consciousness, technological development, human rights, and so on. Ultimately, immersive media has become a channel for social commentary. It is important to remember that games may never be identical to our own reality. Besides, why would a player play a world that is identical to their own? Many players turn to games as a way of escapism. In other words, they are given a way of embodying another character for a while and slip away from what might be a stressful everyday life.

In this thesis, I have shown how the *Blade Runner* universe and *Detroit: Become Human* display a reality where the boundaries between a human and a machine have become blurred, which is a topical discussion in our contemporary society. One might relate the paranoid thinking of these fictional human beings to the real-life paranoia existing in our contemporary society, believing that highly advanced technology will come to take our place in work and social arenas. Along each of these universes' plotlines, there is an underlying tone of paranoia from the humans. In both, there is the fear of being overrun by something greater than themselves, and the uncontrollable aspect of it. What they both have in common is that they interpret different ethical criticisms, posing the questions: What does it mean to be human? How does our humanity connect to our experience of the environment, our history, our society?

Going forward, one can only hope that I convinced you, the reader, that games can be equally measured to other critical, influential media such as film and literature. I hope that I have planted some interest in exploring video game research, and most important of all, to play more games and to explore the world of video games for yourself. Even though games are in the starting phase of becoming socially relevant, and many are skeptical to video games' scholarly potential, but in the words of Connor: "Statistically speaking, there is always a chance for unlikely events to take place."

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