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Izabela Tomczak

Adam Mickiewicz Univeristy of Poznań
izatom@st.amu.edu.pl

America's Digital Messiah(s) of *Detroit: Become Human* (2018)

Abstract. The article explores the relation between biblical archetypes existing in American popular video games. In analyzing a blockbuster title, *Detroit: Become Human* developed by Quantic Dream studio in 2018, the text establishes three examples of the representation of a new model of messiahs/prophets in a digital context. The entire narrative revolves around undermining binary oppositions, as between religion and technology, mass culture and high culture, and Christ/Antichrist. To account for this fluidity, the major concept employed to discuss particular aspects of the games' characters is Beebee's definition of hybrid messiahs.

Keywords: intermedia, game studies, religious studies, myth, digital religion, popular culture

Introduction

In creating a framework for an interpretative analysis of video games, critics frequently incorporate tools previously reserved for literary or film studies. Thus, it comes as no surprise that many authors favor an interdisciplinary, or even an intermediate approach, in particular when discussing the narrative (Atkins 2003; Jones 2008; Sharp 2015). Somewhat following this tradition, this article is largely inspired by Northop Frye's (1976) study of romance, which, as the title suggests, the author views as *The Secular Scripture*. In assuming that traditional games, much like religious acts or sport events, are, in fact, "rituals", Frye established a relationship between the secular (entertainment) and the sacred (sacraments). On another layer, these are connected with myths, because "[r]ituals, like myths, begin in the stage of society described by the term *religio*: they are symbolic

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acts of social cohesion in which the acts that we think of as specifically "religious" are not yet clearly differentiated from others" (Frye 1976, 55). The intricate layer of connections between religion, games, and myths, forms the very basis of this article.

Frye applies his theory to the analysis of romance, claiming that the genre is inherently a mixture of reality and illusion, and sees in that the subconscious nature of writing which follows mythical patterns. I believe that this paradigm is applicable also to popular contemporary video games, which contain narrative structures that are deeply immersed in biblical tradition. Particularly because of the games' interactivity, in video games the performative aspect of a myth can be realized to a fuller degree than in literary works, but at the same time, the prevailing separation of technology and spirituality often causes this aspect to be overlooked. Quite on the contrary, I propose that *because* of the illusory detachment from the mystical and the inexplicable in public life, the spiritual needs of individuals transpire in popular culture.

Perhaps another reason for the limited awareness of religious motifs in video games is the media's reputation. Many blockbuster titles, like the *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007-2013), *Far Cry* (Ubisoft 2004 - 2018) or *Fallout* (Bethesda 2008 - 2018), not only do not shy away from violence, but also often even require the player to perpetuate violent acts. Alongside violence, popularity can be added as another factor which is somewhat "distracting" to the audience and prevents them from comprehending the religious elements interwoven into the narrative. Mass production and popularity are oftentimes placed in direct opposition to the cultured and the valuable, which, in turn, robs the games of their perceived religious potential. Frye faced the same obstacle while discussing popular literature, which, as he believed, was as imbued with religious patterns naturally belonging to "elite literature", but required "only the kind of understanding of the Christian myth that every English family with any books or education would have possessed [...]" in a given time (Frye 1976, 27). In other words, he believed that high-culture religion could be conveyed in a low-culture form to suit the popular tastes, but only in a superficial manner. My assumption is, though, that the explicit knowledge of Christian motifs has decreased in years, and consequently the average player is hardly conscious of the implicit religious patterns in the gameplay. Moreover, the high-culture and low-culture division is no longer valid in the 21st century.

"Religious patterns" or, more specifically, "biblical patterns", are an infinitely broad topic, so in order to form a cohesive unit, the focus of this article will lay on one particular biblical archetype. Starting from the motif of a messiah, a prophet, I will present examples of its literary or theoretic reiterations to finally discuss the theme as present in the video game *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream 2018). In the proposed framework, literature/theory functions as a mediator between the biblical archetype and the game, and, similarly to Atkins' (2003) study, provides critical tools for interpretation.

However, literary inspiration should be sufficiently supported by more contemporary genre-specific studies. Here, a ternary model of analysis developed by Clara Fernández-Vara (2015) will be employed. Her framework revolves around crucial points of analysis, which are the context, the overview and the formal aspects of a giv-

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en game. Moreover, she stresses the fact that the uniqueness of a player's experience may threaten the validity of the research. Each person will play the game differently, and accounting for that is indeed problematic. Her solution to the issue is to either focus on the subjective experience of the author, or to strive for creating an image of what playing is like. The following sections will attempt to tackle this issue.

Pop culture, religion, and the implied player

According to Taylor's (2007) theory, we live in a secular age, in "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others" (Taylor 2007, 3). It does not imply, as it is often suggested, that religion is completely excluded from public life, but that it merely has been marginalized when compared to its position in the past. Taylor emphasizes the fact that the landmark of contemporary culture is the power of choice, of having alternatives. As I propose in this article, a video game can display a functional alternative to a traditional ritual, even without being explicitly about religion, following more post-secular tendencies, that bring religion back into social attention (Habermas 2008).

This idea can be supported by Campbell's function of a myth, where "[i]t puts you in touch with a plane of reference that goes past your mind and into your very being, into your very gut. The ultimate mystery of being and nonbeing transcends all categories of knowledge and thought" (Campbell 1985, as quoted in Rensma 2009, 100-101). Myths are intrinsically unifying, and as such may be understood cross-culturally. If a video game represents these underlying patterns, they can appeal to the masses, regardless of the ethnicity, class, or religion of particular individuals. As Hong says, "games demonstrate the ways in which new media are recalibrating our modes of engagement with the real" (Hong 2015, 35). In this particular case, games would recalibrate and appropriate biblical patterns, which have been thought to belong to a separate cultural sphere (science/religion). Thus, I offer to view the selected titles as popular not *despite* its religious themes, but *because* of them. The desperate belief in a god of atom in *Fallout* and the ruin of Rapture city which had put the man above all deities in *Bioshock* refer to the implicit needs of individuals to connect with their spirituality, which has relatively few public outlets in seemingly secular 21st century.

Here, I'd like to refer to Mazur and McCarthy's *God in the details* (2011), an extensive study of the intersection of religion and American popular culture. In their mind, popular culture with its products and events, such as cartoons or music festivals, create a cross-cultural space for expressing and negotiating identities, including religious ones.

> What is noteworthy is that these are not the casual meetings diverse people experience every day in supermarkets and traffic jams; rather, these chapters show that they are encounters in which questions of ultimate meaning and identity are being struggled over, if not entirely worked out. They are places where members of a society that has tended to privatize religion

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> and demarcate solid denominational lines come (or are thrown) together to explore some very interesting religious questions (Mazur and McCarthy 2011, 3).

The result of, as they write, a Hindu, a Jew, and an evangelical Christian having a chat in *The Simpsons* is introducing spirituality into everyday discourse. Religious concepts resurface then in cultural texts through characters as well as plot. The authors refer to a couple of such patterns: "[v]irgin births, hero journeys, stories of death and resurrection, battles between good and evil, revelatory encounters with supernatural beings", all of which are frequently present in popular culture, video games being no exception. Some video games allow the players to explicitly perform religious practices by praying, belonging to churches/cults or taking part in rituals (Feltmate 2010; Campbell and Grieve 2014; Vallikatt 2014). Some of them will feature explicitly religious character classes, such as monks, priests or paladins (Heidbrink, Knoll and Wysocki 2014). *Detroit: Become Human* (2018), the subject of this analysis, belongs to none of these groups. It is a plot-driven AAA[1] adventure video game with a futuristic setting, telling a story of an android revolution overtaking America. Still, as it will be described in more detail in later sections, the title is imbued with religious meanings.

Since the issue of impact or function of the religious motifs in games is of interest, the concept of a player must be evoked. The basic dilemma is establishing what we consider to constitute 'the player'. Multiple studies tackled that issue from different perspectives, from these with cognitive bias to more literary ones, each focusing on a separate aspect of agency and interaction with the digital world (Aarseth 2007; Vella 2015; Owen 2017). The contemporary game industry stresses the idea of individual experience, allowing the players to determine the outcome of the game by choosing their own path among multiple options. It brings us back to Fernández-Vara's (2015) point – the individuality of each player's experience, whether marked internally by the actions taken in the game, or marked externally by the player's identity – cannot be ignored. Hence, I refer to the concept of an implied player as introduced by Aarseth (2007). An implied player consists of the total formal possibilities of the game, and the criteria that must be fulfilled to play. For the sake of this article I am adopting a more narratively focused approach, as presented by Vella in his doctoral dissertation *The ludic subject and the ludic self: Investigating the 'I-in-the Gameworld* (2015). Vella develops the idea of a player from Zahavi's (2008) 'narrative-self', that is "the acts of the subject – acts understood in the broadest sense, to include physical actions, acts of perception, speech-acts, mental acts, etc. – as meaningful events within a coherent narrative under the sign of a consistent identity" (Vella 2015, 20). In brief, I will be mostly investigating what the player can do or can perceive, rather than what each individual can experience internally.

[1] AAA games - "[c]ommercial digital games with a very large budget, developed by large teams that are usually supported by large publishers. They are distributed using mainstream channels and often are supported by sizable marketing campaigns. Thee term is usually used in opposition to independent games" (Fernández-Vara 2015, 246).

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Theorizing the savior – a hybrid messiah for the hybrid times

Among a number of biblical themes and archetypes represented in contemporary visual media, the one which reoccurs with great frequency is the figure of a messiah or a prophet. As Taylor (2007) believes, the figures of prophets and spiritual leaders are still significant, and can manifest themselves, for example, in charismatic individuals, rulers or politicians. At the same time, claiming that the messiahs in the 21st century video games are direct extensions of the archetypes present in the Bible would be a gross overstatement. Beebee (2009) coins a term "hybrid messiah", which, in the age of fluidity and mixedness, is particularly potent. The concept refers to a character arising from the confusion between seemingly polar opposites - the antichrist and the messiah. "Messiahs of the New World are painfully aware of themselves as simultaneously Self and Other, as I will show in this chapter, and their messianism seeks a symbolic resolution to this conflict" (Beebee 2009, 27). As an example of such a protagonist in American literature, Beebee chooses Ahab.

Countless texts dissecting Melville's novel described the mad captain frequently pointing to his prophetic qualities. Applying hybrid theory to the analysis of this particular character helps reconcile the paradoxical aspects of his nature, for example, his drive to eradicate all evil embodied by Moby-Dick, and his hardly benevolent vengeance-driven motivation. Ahab represents "a culmination of the tension inherited from the Puritans between a view of the sacred as utterly divorced from the profane [...]" (Beebee 2009, 34, after Bercovitch, 1978, 192-193). As Beebee continues, interpretations of Ahab as a protagonist often position him as a ruling tyrant or as a member of the government, so as a figure which is inherently political. This view of a contemporary messiah/prophet as being a political (anti)Christ, both secular and spiritual, can be transferred to popular video games. In most general terms, the image of prophets in video games is an interplay between sets of usually dichotomous ideas like antichrist/messiah or religion/technology. Digital messiahs will frequently represent and/or oppose certain ideologies, e.g. the conservative turn in American internal policy[2].

This dichotomy may be attributed to a twofold process that Bruno Latour (1993) named The Great Divide. The Internal Great Divide distinguishes between nature and culture, and the External Great divide sets apart "us" from "them", grouping entire cultural groups together (e.g. Occident/Orient). In other words, modern society has been primed to perceive the world through a dual perspective, expecting each concept to have its counterpart. This mindset is also applied to the widespread understanding of the society itself, having "softer" and "harder" components (Latour 1993, 53). However, Latour is hardly convinced of the practicality of such an approach. As he writes, "the 'soft' list of the nature pole [is] gathering all the things social scientists happen to despise - religion, consumption, popular culture and politics - while the 'hard' list

[2] Another example of a political hybrid messiah would be John Seed from *Far Cry 5* (2018), who is a vocal proponent of the right to keep arms.

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is made of all the sciences they naively believe in at the time - economics, genetics, biology, linguistics, or brain sciences" (Latour 1993, 53-54). Moreover, he doubts the very purpose of the division, asking "[i]s society so weak that it needs continuous resuscitation? So terrible that, like Medusa's face, it should be seen only in a mirror? Is not society built literally - not metaphorically - of gods, machines, sciences, arts and styles?" (Latour 1993, 54). The detachment of "soft" and "hard" aspects of the society may be convenient for scholars, but hardly has any empirical basis.

Still, these structuralist soft/hard, mind/brain, and, finally, religion/technology divisions, are easily digestible by the public, unlike hybrid and fluid perspectives. The contemporary raise of minority discourse underlines the importance of counterculture and dissolves the fossilized perspectives on, for example, gender or sexuality, accounting for non-binary identities. Video games seem to be following this tendency, which can be exemplified by the presence of hybrid messiahs. The question, if it is done consciously or not, is an entirely different one, definitely worth exploring, but for the sake of this article, it shall remain unaddressed. What is crucial is the hypothesis that the popularity of games and their mass production does not reflect the conscious mainstream beliefs guided by the divisions.

To situate religion and science, or, more precisely, religion and technology within an American context, I shall evoke Doran Larson (1997) and his article "Machine as Messiah: Cyborgs, Morphs, and the American Body Politic". The author sees *Terminator*'s Liquid Metal Man as a sign of a cultural shift towards technodemocracy. Such a technological determinism standpoint can be extrapolated to refer to video games.

> Arnold is not only the perfect man, he is the perfect postmodern, Puritan pilgrim: demonstratively humanoid and incarnate, and thus of this world, but retaining just enough of his Puritan/fascist discipline in order not to be corrupted by it. Ultimately, of course, Arnold will prove not only the perfect pilgrim but **the perfect postmodern Christ**: technological genius incarnate and ready to die to smelt away the sins of technological man (Larson 1997, 65).

Being more than a human, yet lacking the divine factor as a creature of god, the android transgresses the border between the insider and the outsider, or Latour's "us" and "them". Indeed, it seems to come as an embodiment of a new, digital idol, which is seemingly more apt for saving the contemporary world than the traditional biblical representation of the messiah. The Puritan model supports the presence of technology within the American myth of an individual. "[F]rom the ship as church and church as body metaphors of Winthrop and the community of saints, to Benjamin Rush's machine-men in *the machine of government*, to Teddy Roosevelt, [...] stating, *As it is with the individual, so it is with the nation*, the politicized body in America has framed itself in technological landscapes" (Larson 1997, 65). This leads to numerous implications.

On a fundamental level, Larson rejects the idea that technology within the context of American national development is a relatively new concept. Granted, the under-

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standing of "technology" has changed throughout the years, but it has been a somewhat stable foundation for developing identities. Moreover, in recalling Winthrop and Puritanism, the author seems to revive the myth that the American society sprung out from, but later on rejected. Larson states that the dismissal of mythic repetition advocated by the Frankfurt School loses its ground. Myth, politics, and technology can coexist, or, in some cases, reinforce each other. This is precisely the thesis that, I believe, is echoed in video games. This is what Fernández-Vara presents as context of a video game, the political and cultural climate in which it is created and played.

Detroit: Become Human as a digital gospel

One of the most significant features of the title I wish to discuss is that it operates on the spectrum between sci-fi and religion. Gabriel McKee (2007), in his book *The Gospel According to Science Fiction,* clearly rejects the view proposed previously by Darko Suvin (1976) that once science-fiction incorporates mythological and religious elements it transforms into another genre. Instead of science-fiction, it becomes fantasy, since it cannot reconcile facts (science) superstitions (religion((Suvin 1976, as quoted in McKee 2007, xi). On the contrary, McKee writes that "[i]n SF, I see a middle ground between these dangerous absolutes. By combining rational science with imagination and speculation, it creates a space in which absolutes can blend into a synthesis. In SF [...] Machines can believe in God" (McKee 2007, xiv). The general postmodern tendency of blurring the boundaries between genres has touched upon fantasy and sci-fi as well, and even more so, brought them closer to reality. The "real" function of sci-fi is, as McKee writes, "[teaching] us how to keep our belief alive and relevant in a rapidly changing world. It can teach us how to stay human, how not to lose our meaning in the face of technologies that change the way we live our lives. SF can be a spiritual tool" (McKee 2007, xiv). This follows Donna Haraway's (2016) concept of humans as cyborgs, "chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (2016, 7). As she believes, because of continuous medical and technological intervention into human lives, we have become closer to what had been previously known to sci-fi fiction as androids.

This theory finds its visual representation in 2018 *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream 2018) where machines, indeed, believe in god, or even become one. The narrative revolves around three central characters, androids named Markus, Kara and Connor. Through their eyes, the player explores the technology-dominated Detroit of the future, while pondering philosophical questions of ontological nature, and displaying social tensions between humans and their creators. This relationship, parallel to that of a god and a human being, redefines the view on religion in the digital world. Why androids? After Rosi Braidotti,

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> [the] approach, which rests on the binary opposition between the given and the constructed, is currently being replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction. (…). The boundaries between the categories of the natural and the cultural have been displaced and to a large extent blurred by the effects of scientific and technological advances (Braidotti 2014, 3).

Making AI the main protagonist, the story addresses the current abandonment of binary divisions. Moreover, Braidotti (2014) refers to the post-secular turn in post-humanism, which strives to return to the unequivocal religiosity, clear boundaries and rules. Bauman's liquidity became a heavy burden on the 21st century Americans, and returning to well-defined, Puritan rules, ethnic divisions and social classes seem like a tempting alternative. *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream 2018) addresses these concerns, creating a post-human tale of the future while at the same time exploring contemporary spirituality.

Having presented the overview I shall move to discussing formal aspects of the game, that is, visual representation, dialogues, choice design characters; the scaffolding of the game. As Fernández-Vara notices, this aspect is the most crucial for literary and narrative-focused analyses, because it is the most relationship driven. Apart from identifying the features as the 'building blocks', as she says of the game, this section focuses on the connection between the content and the form. However, the boundaries between the overview (including the story and the space) and the form (choice design) becomes blurred, especially in a game like *Detroit* where the story is shaped by choices.

The god-human connection is, conventionally for sci-fi texts, illustrated through the dynamics between a human creator of androids and the robots. In *Detroit* (Quantic Dream 2018) the owner of CyberLife, the company which designed and distributed androids all over America, is a scientist named Elijah Kamski. His revolutionary AI was the first one, according to the games' narrative, to pass the Turing's test, equalizing robots with humans on the level of a basic emotional response. The clear reference to biblical Elijah makes the prophetic layer of the narrative more probable. Chana Shacham-Rosby (2016) discusses how the significance of the Israeli prophet in Christian tradition constitutes him as a herald to the messiah proper. In Jewish texts, however, "Elijah functioned as a thematic link between uncompromising loyalty to Jewish faith and practice, on the one hand, and anticipation of the final redemption and the arrival of the Messiah, on the other" (Shacham-Rosby 2016, 181). In other words, Shacham-Rosby suggests that through the figure of the prophet, Jews reconciled two, seemingly opposite, aspects of their identity. If we extend this mode of thinking to include video games and contemporary reality, it may be said that the in-game Elijah reconciles religion and technology.

Elijah Kamski is also, in a way, a herald of the new age. The PlayStation YouTube channel published a couple of promotional animation clips, one of them stylized as a television interview with Kamski himself. He explains his motivation behind creat-

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ing androids in following words: "we had to imagine a machine in our own image, that resembles us in every way" (PlayStation 2018), and yet it surpasses human capacities. This is parallel to the biblical verse, "[s]o God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them" (Genesis 1:27). In this perspective, Elijah is portrayed not only as a prophet, but as a god/creator. The god who is working in IT is wearing glasses and a jumper, so he is the one closer to humans than the traditionally depicted Christian or Jewish model. Perhaps, this is an answer to the Americans' need to find religion in their contemporary reality, or this is just another tool employed to criticize the 21st century near-blind trust in technology.

Later in the interview, Kamski is forced to answer the questions of fears permeating the public, for example, how AI may influence the job market or interpersonal relationships. Finally, the newscaster inquiries about the potential of a revolt:

> Kamski: I understand the irrational fears about artificial intelligence. But I assure you that will never happen with a CyberLife android. They're designed to obey humans. They're machines. They can't ever develop any sort of desires or form of consciousness.
> Interviewer: Are you sure?
> Kamski: I'm absolutely certain. You can trust me (PlayStation 2018).

At the beginning of the game, the androids are massively gaining consciousness, and by that point, Kamski had been already living in seclusion, refusing to answer to the public. His initially distant and purely scientific approach towards androids, however, has changed. In the chapter 27, "Meet Kamski", Connor, an android controlled by the player, visits the house of his creator. In a dialogue between them we can perceive the shift in Elijah's perspective, for example, in him switching from pronoun 'it' to 'he/she' when talking about androids. There, Connor is subjected to the so-called "Kamski Test". In order to verify the robot's empathy, Connor is offered a deal. He could exchange killing another model of an android for obtaining vital job information. This, in turn, is an echo of Voigt-Kampff's test from Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), where, once again, empathy was used to distinguish humans from androids. The test eventually failed to be valid, and this is also the case in *Detroit.* It is for the player to decide which option Connor choses but the possibility to make that choice on its own suggests that androids in this world are capable of seeing a living being in one of their own.

In the same chapter of the game Kamski hypocritically claims that "machines are so superior to us. *Confrontation was inevitable*[3]. Humanity's greatest achievement threatens to be its downfall" (Quantic Dream 2018). Elijah dissociates himself from his role as a god/creator, and rather views himself as a prophet of the imminent apocalypse. In any variant of dialogue options that the player may choose, Kamski shows his understanding and concern for the cause of the androids, clearly believing that they became new,

[3] Emphasis mine [IT].

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intelligent species, which had surpassed him as well. If we consider the hybrid messiah frame, the antichrist element comes to the forefront. As Hughes defines antichrist, he "is the Adversary, the greatest Christian antihero, the final opponent of Christ, doomed, before he even begins, to failure at the apocalyptic judgment seat" (Hughes 2005, 1). In other words, it is the necessary counterbalance to the messiah, and a force preceding the final victory of Christ. Moreover, "[a]ntichrist represents the consummation of all human evil" (Hughes 2005, 6), here, showcased through Kamski's initial hubris. If we consider Kamski precisely as this false messiah, the one appearing prior to the true appearance of the savior, another potential interpretation opens up.

The "true" messiah, as it may be, could potentially be another AI. RA9, as the androids call them[4], is never directly present, but functions as a symbol known to all deviants, that is, androids with consciousness. RA9 came *after* Kamski, but also by his hand. Throughout the game, the player is confronted with rA9 in multiple ways: statuettes, inscriptions of the name on the wall, and most of all, in dialogue with other androids. Many deviants would obsessively write "rA9" accompanied by slogans "WAKE UP" or "I am alive!" on various surfaces in their houses. One of the first deviants investigated by Connor explains that he had made one of the idols as an offering to rA9 to receive salvation. When asked who rA9 is, the android only answers "the day shall come when we no longer will be slaves (…). We will be the masters" (Quantic Dreams 2018). This may be a twist of John 15:15, when Jesus says "[n]o longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard". However, the revolution of rA9 does not strive for equality, but for the domination of the AI.

Here, Hughes (2005) may be evoked again, since he proposes a theory that the "[a]ntichrist does not spring fully formed from the pages of Scripture. Rather, he is a figure whose profile and significance took shape over nearly a millennium of reflection on a variety of hints and clues scattered throughout the Scriptures and traditions of Christian faith" (2005, 1). In that, rA9 would fit into the theme of a hybrid messiah – they promise delivery from the evil, but at the same time, encourage violent revolution and have no tangible proof of their existence within the game world. It is a rendition of the biblical "great rebel warrior leading an attack on the ranks of God's army of faith" (Hughes 2005, 7), but this time, rA9 is attacking the children of god (humans), rather than the believers.

Another deviant represented in the game, a mentally unstable unit called Ralph, is caught red-handed while engraving the name "rA9" into the walls of his abode. The inquiries about the meaning of the phrase are met with a confused "I don't know" (Quantic Dream 2018). Since the character is portrayed as having multiple personalities, the player is not too surprised at his inability to explain himself. The first android to offer a more substantial answer is Luther who accompanies the android Kara in

[4] The androids are generally sexless, but as they gain consciousness, many of them align with a chosen sex, however, the identity of rA9 is unknown, so I'm using "they" as a main pronoun [IT].

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the later parts of the game. According to him, "rA9 was the first one of us to awaken" (Quantic Dream 2018). It suggests that, much like Judeo-Christian messiah, the savior comes from within, from "us", and is destined to set the androids free. The nature of the belief in rA9 is speculative, and not all deviants believe in them, but it has a deep social function – it gives many of the androids the purpose.

Connor even remarks that the conscious androids have little in common – they are different models and types, coming from different backgrounds and shops, yet what brings them together is their faith (Quantic Dream 2018). The symbolic function of religion is parallel to the one outside of the game universe, representing a multiplicity of beliefs in an almost ecumenical kind of spirituality, which instead of dividing, connects. "It's almost like some kind of... myth", says Connor finally, proving that he himself is capable of comprehending mythical structures (Quantic Dream 2018). Kamski, in the very same scene with the "Kamski Test", claims that he does not know who rA9 is or if they even exist, but he does not doubt they sparked a "spontaneous religion". The scientist offers his own musings, that "[m]aybe it's a messiah, maybe it's a myth, but deviants need to believe in something bigger than themselves, even if it's irrational. That's something they have in common with humans" (Quantic Dream 2018). Rather than focusing on the messiah, the game focuses on his function as the inspiring, if irrational force. Donna Haraway in her *Cyborg Manifesto*... writes that "[t]he cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden (…). Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not re-member the cosmos" (Haraway 2016, 9). Yet, one of the main characters in *Detroit* walks into the Eden Club, frequently visits an idyllic Zen Garden, and, as I argued in the previous paragraphs, his fellow androids are capable of worship.

The revolutionary aspect of the antichrist archetype reverberates deeply in another messianistic character present in the game, an android named Markus[5]. Markus is a personal aid to a famous disabled painter, Carl Manfred. In one of the initial chapters of the game, "The Painter", the player is confronted with a nearly father-and-son relationship between Carl and Markus. In Christian terminology, "(…) the Biblical metaphor "father" draws out a paradoxical picture of a very powerful father who is also very tender" (Spencer 1996, 440). Indeed, Carl seems like a kind "owner", who sees humanity in his android, much like more sympathetic (yet not innocent) characters in American captivity narratives. Moreover, the relationship with his biological son, Leo, is parallel to the parable about the prodigal son. Being a drug addict, constantly dependent on his father for money, Leo stands in stark contrast with the perfectly designed Markus.

However, Carl is not the controlling force which sends Markus away, and it is not Carl's will that is being carried out, but rather the player's. Carl, interestingly enough, is the one to encourage Markus to make his own autonomous decisions. Depending on a variety of choices, the story takes it shapes in a simulacra of different realities, all of

[5] The name can be a potential reference to the author of Gospel, Mark; after all, Markus is also a narrator of his section of the story [IT].

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which arise from the same starting point – Markus forcibly leaving the house of Manfred. It is up to the player whether the android becomes a savior or brings destruction to his people. The aspect of the player's decisiveness is a separate point, no doubt extremely important, but for the sake of this article I will discuss only the possible outcomes of the choices, and not the moral weight or the importance of the choices themselves.

Markus' role as a messiah is tied to a particular place, namely, a freighter called Jericho[6]. The ship becomes a refuge for sentient androids, who share the coded location of their safe spot between each other. The chapter "Jericho" ends with Markus reaching this place, and accepting his position as an informal leader of the android refugees. The player may choose to, in very simplified terms, conduct a peaceful revolution, or dominate the world of the humans by force. Here, once again, Beebee's (2009) hybrid messiah may become relevant.

This leads me to another point, this time referring more to the game as a medium than to the specific content of a given narrative. The hybridity of Markus as a character is grounded in computer games being, as Jesper Juul wrote, "existent-creating machines" (Juul 2001). In other words, games, and, most notably, *Detroit* (2018), possess the ability to create a simulation of various outcomes, depending on the choices made by the player. In that, Markus can align more with the archetype of Christ or the antichrist, but we cannot say that he *is* either; not when we consider the totality of the experience of the implied player. In a way, he, and many other characters, function nearly like Schrödinger's cat.

Hence, as Markus, the player executes a number of missions which aim to liberate androids like a demonstration, setting free a warehouse worth of robots, or broadcasting a public message about the cause. In every scenario either a more violent or a more peaceful route can be undertaken. The former is not free from sacrifices, and, for example, remaining passive in a confrontation with armed police, ends up with many androids losing their lives. Markus himself can chose to stand up to the guards and in consequence, die a martyr:

> [T]he work of the hero is to slay the tenacious aspect of the father (dragon, tester, ogre king) and release from its ban the vital energies that will feed the universe. This can be done either in accordance with the Father's will or against his will; he [the Father] may 'choose death for his children's sake,' or it may be that the Gods impose the passion upon him, making him their sacrificial victim. These are not contradictory doctrines, but different ways of telling one and the same story; in reality, Slayer and Dragon, sacrificer and victim, are of one mind behind the scenes, where there is no polarity of contraries, but mortal enemies on the stage, where the everlasting war of the Gods and the Titans is displayed. (…) The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies *himself* today (Campbell 2004, 325-326).

[6] The choice to make Jericho a ship is most likely the reference to the city being "the lowest city on earth" below the sea level (Murphy O'Connor 2001, 126). In final parts of the game the ship sinks under the water.

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This somewhat lengthy, but very meaningful quote, leads to multiple implications. First, Markus as a hero is either following, or disregarding the father's will. Although it was stated that Carl was a father figure for him in the narrative, in this context it seems like "the will" belongs to someone outside the plot, to the player. Then, there is no option to disobey it, as the player is in complete control of the actions. Regardless of the adapted perspective, however, it should be emphasized that Markus as a messiah may suffer a final blow, and, unlike Christ, will never be resurrected. It contradicts the cyclical nature of the myth that Campbell discussed, and is, as I propose, a very millennial, pessimistic turn on the function of the savior. Not all can be saved, and not all will.

If Markus remains alive, his character undergoes further development; he becomes the leader of a full-blown revolution. If peaceful, the game ends with the armed forces withdrawing from the conflict, and Markus delivers a victorious speech claiming that "we are alive, and now, we are free" (Quantic Dreams 2018). His mission as a deliverer of androids comes to a successful fruition, and, much like Moses, he leads the androids to a (politically) new land. The very same scene also has its darker rendition. During the course of the plot, the player may act against public opinion, and, therefore, make humans openly hostile towards the androids (and vice versa). This opens up a possibility for Markus to, again, sacrifice himself, or detonate a dirty bomb. The game shows an animated sequence of various news broadcasts speculating whether the radiation would be lethal, and what the catastrophe would ultimately mean for humanity. The president calls for immediate evacuation, and Markus delivers his final lines saying once again that "we are free" (Quantic Dreams 2018).

From the perspective of humans, Markus embodies the antichrist, bringing the apocalypse with him. Charles Taylor can be once more mentioned, with the words "[...] the God invoked by the Prophets, who frequently enjoins us to forget sacrifice, and succor the widows and orphans. So violence is now on a new footing. It is in the service of the Higher. And this means it can be all the more implacable, ruthless and thorough" (Taylor 2007, 687).

Conclusions

It can be hardly doubted that *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dreams 2018) makes numerous parallels and references to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The archetype of a messiah (or a hybrid messiah, as it was shown) is but one example of the game translating innate mythical structures to a digital language. The game, after all, poses relevant questions of the place of religion in a digital society, of what it means to be human, and addresses the post-human fears[7]. Most of all, *Detroit* is not an isolated

[7] "The posthuman provokes elation but also anxiety about the possibility of a serious de-centering of 'Man', the former measure of all things" (Bradotti 2013, 2).

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example, but fits into a larger framework of (quasi-)religious games such as *Far Cry 5* (Ubisoft 2018) or *Outlast* (Red Barells 2013, 2017). It is noteworthy that the game was also a huge commercial success, proven by over 3 million copies sold from May 27th 2018 to January 2019 on only one platform. Its huge popularity led to the prospects of going to a multiplatform, and to become available for a larger audience of players (Palumbo 2019). We could speculate that the general tendency in the gaming industry, and the warm reception of religiously colored narratives, reveals the deeply-buried need of contemporary Americans to manifest their spiritual needs in pop culture.

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