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***Detroit: Become Human* – Orientational Mapping in the City and (Hi)Story**

A very strong element of *Detroit* is that there is a lot of industrial wasteland – and a lot of nature, too – and for us, the graphic designers, it was an incredible playground: The destroyed zones, which we wanted to preserve, we appropriated them to turn into something else. Then, in the areas that needed to be rebuilt, we were able to imagine our Detroit of the future. We didn't want to make a science fiction universe, but a world of anticipation.

Christophe Brusseaux, Graphic Director *Detroit: Become Human*
("Detroit Become Human – Art of Detroit," 01:02–01:26)

Detroit: Become Human (2018) is an interactive drama and adventure game played from a third-person perspective.¹ As the name gives away, the game is set in Detroit – in the not-so-distant future of the year 2038. By then, as is the premise of the game, the city will have turned into an 'Android City' in which humans and androids, AI robots that look like humans, live together. Originally created as aides for and servants of humans, androids have also replaced humans in many occupations. This continuous loss of human jobs to machines as well as the gradual spiritual awakening of androids are the central causes of conflict and the starting point of *Detroit Become Human*. The game's plot, similar to many TV shows, is divided into three story lines: Each revolves around a different android, Connor (a police android), Markus (a caretaker), and Kara (a housekeeper), offering three distinct android perspectives. Comparable to television shows, players also alternately play these three androids in different episodes. As the androids gain consciousness and emancipate themselves from their sole purpose as service machines to humans, one possible ending leads

¹ The production company Quantic Dream coined this genre designation for their games (see Schenk 190–191), as their focus is as much on the narrative as on the visual and technical aspects of a video game. The developers also use techniques from other audio-visual media to realize their game. As the storytelling is intermedial, researchers can also bring in analytical tools and concepts from different media, especially from Television Studies and Seriality Studies. As Sabine Schenk states, "[it] is a small leap from television to computers" (183), particularly since TVs are becoming smarter and offer more interactive experiences. Shane Denson and Andreas Sudmann in "Digital Seriality: On the Serial Aesthetics and Practice of Digital Games" (2017) further describe how "[s]eriality is a factor not only in explicitly marked game series, but also within individual games, as well as on the level of transmedial relations between games and other media." Henry Jenkins discusses this medial flux and overlap in various medial forms in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006).

to the three protagonists partaking in or, in the case of Markus, leading a successful androids' civil rights movement.

As an interactive drama *Detroit: Become Human* was conceptualized similar to other audio-visual media but in greater detail to account for its interactivity. Its story was developed over 4,000 pages of script instead of the about 45 to 75 pages used for an hour-long TV show. This size accounts for the extraordinarily great number of different gameplay options players can choose from via dialogue.² These decisions are one characteristic feature of the gameplay that gives players the agency to significantly alter the game's plot progression. The number of different characters and settings a player encounters also necessitate the very detailed script. Consequentially, all options had to be shot scene by scene with real actors using motion capture, performance capture, body-only shoots (for action scenes), and a distinct cinematographic presentation for each protagonist (see "The Making Of" 26:49). The viewing angles from which players see and experience the game are designed to simulate camera angles (see 25:45). Depending on the mode of the game, however, players can move and guide these camera angles themselves. This guarantees a realistic and immersive experience for players.

As technical advancements in digital game play progress, so do the story-worlds. Cities, as the "most enduring self-organized form of people living together" (Faßler 11, my translation),³ frequently function "as the major sites and topics of cultural production and consumption as well as of cultural, social and political progress" (Buchenau and Gurr, "Urban American Studies" 399). They are, thus, the subject of "place-making texts" (Buchenau and Gurr, "On the Textuality" 2), narratives that occupy an important part in the process of shaping or commenting on the cultural identity of a place. Such place-making texts appear in various forms and media. However, scholarship has not studied video games as place-making texts. Yet, as the epigraph reveals, this is exactly what the producers of *Detroit: Become Human* are trying to create. The graphic director of the game describes Detroit as an "incredible playground" of vacant land that they "appropriated" to "imagine [their] Detroit of the future" ("*Detroit Become Human* – Art of Detroit" 01:00 – 01:26).⁴ While also working to "preserve" and

² As actor Jesse Williams, who plays Markus, explains, "[e]very decision the player makes, it's going to open up 40 more pages of material" ("*The Making Of*" 13:30).

³ In the German original, Manfred Faßler states that "Stadt ist die historisch robusteste Selbstorganisation menschlichen Zusammenlebens" (11).

⁴ This treatment of the city or at least parts of the city as empty land devoid of meaning happens frequently in postindustrial Detroit. It is popular in urban imaginaries, but also appears in actual urban planning projects. Treating urban places as empty neglects to see their histories

“rebuil[d]” (“Detroit Become Human – Art of Detroit” 01:00 – 01:26), the makers of *Detroit: Become Human* added additional layers to the city’s complex imaginary.

Cities in general, according to American studies scholar Klaus Benesch, are “open systems” with an “innate tendency towards continual self-transcendence” (12). Therefore, they have an infinite potential to expand and proliferate that seems “incalculable” (Benesch 12). Players of what I would describe as story-world-building games (similar to open world games but with a distinct focus on narrative exploration)⁵ intuitively develop skills to cope with these elaborate spatial structures⁶ – guided by the games’ producers. However, players and scholars can also benefit from fixed analytical tools to uncover additional layers of meaning for these types of video games. One such tool is a technique I term orientational mapping.

While it may *seem* redundant to call a technique *orientational* mapping, this analytical term serves to highlight the actual function and active process of mapping. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the verb ‘to map’ as “to describe, outline, chart, or represent as if on a map” (*OED*) while ‘mapping’ is defined as “the drawing, making, or provision of a map or maps” (*OED*). The documentary function of maps seems to be predominant in the standardized definitions. In this chapter and with regard to the player agency in *Detroit: Become Human*, however, the focus lies on the personal, cognitive, and active function of mapping. For Robert J. Tally, video games – as narratives – necessitate this type of orientation but also offer guidance along the way. To him narratives are, in fact, actual “mapping machines” as they are “simultaneously something that maps and something to be mapped” (3). Taking these facets into account, I define orientational mapping as *the practice of finding your bearings, orienting yourself, or being oriented within a (fictional) space*.

Orientational Mapping can be experienced and analyzed in three ways: *visually*, *narratively*, and *temporally*. First, a visual analysis of recognizable landmarks and built features of Detroit within the game helps players to locate them-

and people, which can translate to plans that exclude or displace existing communities. For a detailed problematization of this see Sattler “Finding Words: American Studies in Dialogue with Urban Planning.”

5 As lead game designer Simon Wasselin puts it: “There are games out there offering world exploration. We offer narrative exploration” (see “The Making Of” 13:00).

6 What Jason Mittell has determined for complex television shows also rings true for other media, such as video games: audiences need to have “formal memory” (“Previously On” 96) and “procedural literacy” (“Narrative Complexity” 39) to successfully orientate themselves within the storyworld.

selves within the city imaginary of *Detroit: Become Human*. Here, knowledge of real-life locations can enhance this experience. Second, the narrative exploration of *Detroit: Become Human*'s plot is aided by different modes in the game, namely the “mind palace” and an extensive tree diagram. Orientation within the visual and narrative setting of the game, finally, opens the possibility of adding depth to the depiction and experience of a fictionalized city by also anchoring it within its history. This is possible through the analysis of typologies and palimpsestic layers of Detroit's past in *Detroit: Become Human*'s city imaginary.

Visual, Narrative, and Temporal Mapping

Cities are highly complex in form and function. It is therefore impossible to experience, let alone depict a city in its totality. Writers, artists, or filmmakers need to find ways of coping with and visually mapping cities despite these limitations. One such strategy is “cityscaping” – described by Therese Fuhrer, Felix Mundt, and Jan Stenger as “the process through which an image of a city or an urban landscape is imaginatively constructed” (1). In *Detroit: Become Human*, such “cityscaping” mainly works through grounding the fictional Detroit of the video game in the real Detroit by depicting well known sights and landmarks of the city.⁷ Since “only a few elements may be needed to create the [...] backdrop to an action or to situate some particular content,” Fuhrer, Mundt, and Stenger explain, “the ‘scenography’ of a cityscape may be selective” (Fuhrer, Mundt, and Stenger 1).

This use of well-known “urban ‘props’” (Fuhrer, Mundt, and Stenger 3) – boiled-down portrayals of characteristic landmarks that are also aesthetically appealing – to create a city imaginary is particularly characteristic of audio-visual media. When the rebelling androids of *Detroit: Become Human* march past the renowned statue of The Spirit of Detroit to campaign for civil rights, for example, any player of the game with a slight knowledge of Detroit can locate the ongoing action on the central road of downtown Detroit, Woodward Avenue. Similarly, accurate, yet ‘futurized’ depictions of landmarks exist of the well-known Monument to Joe Louis, St. Mary's Church, Belle Isle, and the Detroit Skyline. The game, however, also depicts important infrastructure decisive for the workings of the city, such as a monorail system, the Rosa Parks Transit Center, or well-known street crossings in the downtown area.

7 For visual examples of the comparison between the real and digitally created Detroit, see “Detroit Become Human – Game vs Real Life Detroit” on YouTube.

Such “urban props” in audio-visual media work similarly to the “textual declarations” (91) that Marie-Laure Ryan discusses for narrative mapping in literature. In *Detroit: Become Human*, like in the narratives Ryan describes, these signposts and guidelines for readers’ mental constructions of a storyworld function through “the import of information provided by internalized cognitive models, inferential mechanisms, real-life experience, and cultural knowledge” (91).⁸ This experience differs from person to person, as everyone brings a different background and knowledge to the text.⁹ The previous and contextual knowledge players are expected to bring to *Detroit: Become Human* can be deduced from the first glance at the game trailer: The decaying, sometimes even burned down (suburban) houses in the trailer directly reference the ubiquitous trope of Detroit as ‘the city in ruins,’ while the 2038 setting of the video game is referenced through futuristic downtown skyscrapers and a highline transport system. These instantaneous orientations are especially important for this game, as it is not an open world game. Instead, the player is dropped off in a limited part of the city for each episode.

Detroit as a location is important for the game. However, the focus lies much more on narrative space than on the physical or geographical space. Narrative space, in contrast to geographical space, describes the unfolding space given to the narrative elements of a video game, and the care dedicated to developing story over, for instance, setting. This distinction highlights the importance of different forms of orientational mapping within a game, not just the geographical kind.¹⁰ Thus, the second form of orientational mapping in *Detroit: Become*

8 In this context, see also the “mental maps” city dwellers come up with to make sense of and navigate the city that are studied in behavioral geography (see Lynch).

9 Winfried Fluck explains that “what we actually see is shaped by the store-house of images in our imagination with which we approach the pictures. The transfer through which aesthetic experience is brought about thus entails a screening of the picture in terms of the images with which we approach it. In this process, we ‘de-corporealize’ the image in order to be able to link it with new experiences and meanings, so that we can make it ‘our own’” (Fluck, “Playing Indian” 77) Therefore people’s “aesthetic experience[s]” (Fluck, “Playing Indian” 74) are highly individual. Drawing on Wolfgang Iser, Fluck defines “imaginary transfer” as the “key formative aspect” (“Playing Indian” 74) of this experience.

10 It also alludes to the oftentimes neglectful treatment of the spatial dimension of a story compared to the temporal or narrative one. As TV scholar Jason Mittell attests for complex television shows, “[w]hile many fans will try to make sense of muddled chronology or plot continuity, such geographical incoherence in navigating a story space is typically only recognised by natives of a given city searching for spatial realism, suggesting that [...] temporal consistency trumps spatial coherence” (“Serial Orientations” 173). This is also true for *Detroit: Become Human*, whose creators have excelled in digitally recreating landmarks such as The Spirit of Detroit or ‘The Fist’ but have been criticized for failing to coherently connect and properly place the different set-

Human concerns the narrative within individual scenes and its overall structure. In times when narratives of any kind grow increasingly more complex it becomes essential for recipients to orient themselves within a story to find their way through it.¹¹ This suggests or even requires a more active interest of players in the form and medium of their narrative.¹²

In *Detroit: Become Human*, one feature of narrative orientation is learned in the very first scene:¹³ By pressing the R2 button, players can access the so-called “mind palace,” an analytical mode that presents the surrounding area in a grid system. In this mode, players can recap movements, find clues, and ascertain success rates for their actions. Similar to modern land surveying technologies,¹⁴ the agency of mapping a place lies not in the actions and movements of the character, player, or land surveyor but in the fixed, given measurements of a machine, laser beam, or grid. While androids aim to *Become Human*, as the game’s title suggests, the “mind palace” indicates that they still map and reconstruct narrative situations in a computerized way.

Narrative orientational mapping in *Detroit: Become Human* also works on the level of what Jason Mittell has called “orienting paratexts” (“Serial Orientations” 165) for television. These supplements to the actual narrative “exist outside the diegetic storyworld, providing a perspective for viewers to help make sense of a narrative world by looking at it from a distance” (165). Such “orienting practices” (165) thus give audiences guidance to general plot questions or for locating their current position within a narrative. In *Detroit: Become Human*, the “orienting paratext” (165) is an official part of the game in the form of a tree dia-

tings of the game compared to the actual Detroit (see Seppala). However, this is not necessarily a negative aspect: when reality is presented in a “fictional mode” (Fluck, “Aesthetic Experience” 416) it allows the medium to restructure and highlight or hide certain features. As soon as you no longer “insist[s] that reality is truthfully represented” you can “concentrate on other aspects and possible functions of the object” (Fluck, “Imaginary Space” 30) or place, allowing for artistic freedom to explore new perspectives, to express criticism, or to uncover things.

11 This increase in complexity happens because of a general high familiarity with different media and to motivate recipients to re-read, re-watch, or replay said narrative. For more information regarding the topic of ‘rewatchability,’ see e.g., Mittell “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television” (2006).

12 This is, so to speak, a double-edged sword of interdependence, where increased media literacy allows for more medially complex narratives, but more complexity also asks for more active engagement with the narrative.

13 The developers of *Detroit: Become Human* themselves speak of ‘scenes’ in the game’s “Making Of” rather than of ‘levels’ or ‘sub-levels,’ further underlining the game’s structural and conceptual similarities to TV shows, movies, or plays.

14 For more on this, see Eric Haas’ talk “Do We Have to Stick to the Script? ... Cities, Surveys and Describing” at The Mediated City Conference in Los Angeles, 1–4 October 2014.

gram.¹⁵ During and after each episode or level, players can track their progress or go back and unlock new options of continuing the storyline.¹⁶ While connected to the internet, they can also see how their choices are faring compared to other players worldwide.

This organization of the narrative in *Detroit: Become Human* can be described as what Christoph Bode and Rainer Dietrich define as “future narratives” (3). According to Bode and Dietrich, these are “narratives that have at least one nodal situation or node. A node [...] is a situation that allows for more than one continuation” (16). In *Detroit: Become Human* each scene within an episode (level) is such a nodal or decision point. There are multiple options on how to handle a task or problem. Depending on which action a player chooses to take, the game’s plot – the causally connected sequence of events within *Detroit: Become Human*’s narrative – develops in a different way. This type of open, multi-option, interactive narrative suggests a special agency of the player, since “the essential narrative labor of connecting can be delegated to and be carried out by [him or her]” (Bode and Dietrich 5).¹⁷ In this highly complex game, players are granted a quasi-behind-the-scenes look at their own narrative labor in the form of a flow chart or tree diagram. From the very first scene, for each nodal point, they can map and track their choices, what consequences these had, and how many other options were available. For *Detroit: Become Human*, this official “orienting paratext” (Mittell, “Serial Orientations” 165) aids players in situating themselves within the narrative, increases re-playability of the game by laying open other plot options,¹⁸ and it ensures that players see the complexity of the game and the effort that was put into making it.¹⁹

15 For more on the literary concept of ‘paratext’ as well as its usability for other media, see Gérard Genette *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997).

16 Compared to open world games where players are able to stroll around the storyworld to explore the entirety of the game, in *Detroit: Become Human*, the space to further discover the game world is narrative space, something the lead game designers specifically set out to offer (see “The Making Of” 13:00 – 13:04).

17 The writers of *Detroit: Become Human*, in fact, approached the game in a way where their “job [was] to provide a narrative context in which the player can write his own story. You are giving him this kind of narrative Lego that he can kind of snap together in his own shape” (“Making Of” 11:00 – 11:11).

18 Notably, in this context, the tree diagram only reveals that there were other options of action, thereby not spoiling the fun of revealing which options these are.

19 The inclusion of “future narratives” in video game narration may even have the potential to solve or at least lessen the problem that “[i]nteractivity and narrative seem to be incompatible with each other” (Schenk 184).

By using the visual and narrative mapping cues to situate their playable characters in the events happening in the fictional Detroit of 2038, players can also map the game's time and place in the succession of the city's history. Orientational mapping in the temporal contexts of *Detroit: Become Human* works as a typology as well as in the form a palimpsest. Typology is concerned with sets of types, while the metaphorical concept of the palimpsest is used to investigate layers, rewritings, and simultaneity. These forms of temporal mapping are not mutually exclusive but can function simultaneously.

Typology as “[t]he study of symbolic representation, esp. of the origin and meaning of Scripture types” (*OED*) is a helpful tool in mapping the temporal context of the video game. *Detroit: Become Human* refers to different historical and symbolic types when, for example, drawing on famous nicknames of Detroit or its image and reputation. Commonly, Detroit is denoted as the Motor City, or more recently as ‘the city in ruins.’ In *Detroit: Become Human*, the city now has the byname ‘Android City.’ While this does not cancel out the (visually still prevailing) city in ruins, the Android City draws a direct analogy to the Motor City moniker. The fictional Detroit of the future is once again the center of a mechanized work revolution, where the history of Fordism clearly shines through the new paradigm of ‘Androidism’ – from the basic premise of non-human optimization of labor down to the fears of replacement of and objections by the citizens of Detroit.²⁰ Thus, with this label, the game identifies its setting as a particular type of city: either the mechanized, industrial city devoid of humans or the city where machines are favored over humans.

The concept of the palimpsest as a piece of parchment that has been written on and scratched off several times with multiple layers still shining through has proven popular in urban studies to document and symbolize the different historical layers and stages of the material city.²¹ However, the concept is also important for the imaginary of a city. According to Fuhrer, Mundt, and Stenger, the “value of the term ‘palimpsest’ is that it reminds us of the structural depth of images of cities and the simultaneous presence of diverging elements” (15).²² This is what the temporal dimension of orientational mapping can highlight for *Detroit:*

²⁰ This, by definition, is also a palimpsest.

²¹ For the concept behind the term palimpsest, see Genette *Palimpsests* (1997).

²² They further elaborate that “each text, each painting, each relief or film that represents an image of the city, overwrites to a greater or lesser degree, the previous mental representations of the city, with the result that the urban space is like a parchment that has been written upon several times. As each new model is laid over the previous ones, though without obscuring them entirely, the image of the city becomes inscribed with different layers of time and different cultural preferences and meanings” (15).

Become Human, here exemplified by the androids' "March to Freedom," which is the actual title of one of the episodes of the game. It combines the well-known March on Washington and the lesser-known Walk to Freedom, which took place in Detroit in 1963 and, thus, draws a line from the android emancipation and their civil rights movement to the historical Civil Rights Movement of ethnic minorities in the 1960s.

In a parallelism and problematic mixing that reaches further back historically, the game's plot is also linked to the struggle for freedom by African Americans: The different choices for protesting chants a player can choose from during the androids' march also allude to the fight to abolish slavery. The different buttons on the gaming controller offer the options "we are people," "no more slavery," "set us free," and "we are alive" respectively. Although the game here seems to (sometimes problematically) mix (up) different, yet related historical instances, players, who are familiar with this history, are still able to place and map the narrative actions in the real-life history and setting of Detroit.

The androids' march, for example, follows the same route down Woodward Avenue towards the river that the Walk to Freedom led by Martin Luther King took 75 years earlier. They visibly walk past the statue of The Spirit of Detroit, which is indeed on this route, and the place they are marching towards is also one of symbolic importance and consists of many historic layers: Hart Plaza is the alleged spot where in 1701 French imperial explorer Antoine Laumet de la Mothe Cadillac first landed and founded the colonial settlement that is now Detroit. Since 1975, it has been a public park that now holds statues for workers' rights, the Underground Railroad, and the Dodge family. It is also situated right next to the Cobo Arena (now TCF Center), the place where in 1963, Martin Luther King held an early version of his "I Have a Dream" speech at the end of the Walk to Freedom. This revelation casts the android Markus (played by Black American actor and activist Jesse Williams) as a 'civil rights leader' in a typological sense, as an android Martin Luther King. In fact, the game's narrative options dictate that only when the emancipation movement tries to practice non-violence, are they successful.

Thus, *Detroit: Become Human* places the android movement in direct succession of the Civil Rights Movement. The very last episode of the game, episode 32 "Battle for Detroit," is divided into three plot strings (one for each protagonist). Markus' storyline lends itself to tracing the history and symbolism of Detroit in it: It starts out with the 'Hart Plaza Freedom March' and potentially ends with revolution and a final rally that leads to a favorable public opinion towards androids. At the rally, Markus speaks to his people from an improvised stage on the battle-stricken Hart Plaza. There, the Dodge Fountain – a memorial to the 'industrial masters' – is thrown over while the androids are victorious, and the arches

of the workers' rights memorial still gleam in the background. That Markus is cast as a leader in the tradition of Martin Luther King can also be concluded from the content of Markus' final speech: He stresses that the androids are "emerg[ing] from a long night" (*Detroit: Become Human*). This is a metaphor and motif employed by King and other civil rights speakers to describe the end of slavery, most prominently in King's "I Have a Dream" speech. In the speech, he describes the Emancipation Proclamation as "a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity."

While it can be fascinating to immerse oneself in this enhanced narrative experience, the game also requires a cautious approach. Digital media and computing scholars Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman explore how

a player relates to a game character through the double-consciousness of play. A protagonist character is a persona through which a player exerts him or herself into an imaginary world; this relationship can be intense and emotionally "immersive." However, at the very same time, the character is a tool, a puppet, an object for the player to manipulate according to the rules of the game. In this sense, the player is fully aware of the character as an artificial construct. (453)

While players are thus used to treating their playable characters as "tool[s]" or "puppet[s]" (453), *Detroit: Become Human* personalizes a pressing current and recurring social and political issue through one protagonist without ever explicitly acknowledging or problematizing it.²³ Even though players need some historical knowledge to grasp the full extent of references, these allusions to historical events are not particularly subtle. Equating the Black Civil Rights Movement in the United States with a fictional emancipation movement of de-facto machines in *Detroit: Become Human* has highly problematic undercurrents: It not only could be said to remind of or even resume a treatment of African Americans as non-humans for dramatic emotional effect. It also generalizes the specific struggle of a specific people, especially when considering that the game also conflates the American Civil Rights and Abolitionist movements, thereby negat-

23 These are not the only issues *Detroit: Become Human* uses to uncritically equate divergent experiences of hardship and discrimination. As media and video game scholar Daniela Bruns describes, "*Detroit: Become Human* repeatedly refers to inhumane practices of slavery, racial segregation, and genocide. To name a few examples: the junkyard for androids evokes images of a mass grave; the division of public transport into compartments for androids and humans refers to the systematic suppression of the African American population in the United States; and triangle and armband of the android uniform induces associations of the forced labeling of the Jewish population with the Star of David during National Socialism in Germany" (181).

ing any progress made by Black Americans in-between those eras.²⁴ While Western societies today have not achieved ethnic and racial equality, the hard-fought progress and achievements of Black Americans toward this goal should not be overlooked or blurred in the name of a “social science fiction” (Bruns 173) gaming plot.

Conclusion

Orientation in space is not only important for movement in cities but also for playing video games. This chapter introduced the technique of orientational mapping, ‘the practice of finding your bearings, orienting yourself, or being oriented within a (fictional) space,’ to analyze the various forms of orientation in *Detroit: Become Human*. Not only is orienting oneself visually, narratively, and temporally helpful for the successful completion of the game, but it can “create a layer atop the programme to help figure out how the pieces fit together or propose alternate ways of seeing the pieces” (Mittell, “Serial Orientations” 165).

On a visual level, the use of “urban props” (Fuhrer, Mundt, and Stenger 3) helps to instantaneously locate oneself in exact locations within the city of Detroit. These locations can carry specific connotations that are important for the tasks that players have to complete, but with their detailed graphical realization, they can also allow a glimpse at a ‘realistic’ Detroit imaginary. Taking this technique even further, players or reviewers could look past the clear-cut “urban props” toward geographic inconsistencies in relation to the real-life city in a next step. Some locals looking for spatial realism have noticed these in the game. However, these inconsistencies (at least in this game) do not seem to affect the general geographic logic of the game.

Narrative orientation within *Detroit: Become Human* works on two levels: On the one hand, the “mind palace” mode of looking at scenes allows for a systematic tracing of the information needed to advance in the narrative. The paratextual tree diagram, on the other hand, reveals *Detroit: Become Human* to be a “future narrative” that gives players agency to design the game’s plot. With their decisions, players activate different paths to advance in the game. The tree diagram allows players to locate themselves within the narrative progression but

²⁴ In an essay with a larger scope or more specific focus on the portrayal of social justice issues in video games, one could further critically interrogate the implications of discussing the “double consciousness” (Salen and Zimmerman 453) of video game players in the context of Black Emancipation and Civil Rights Movements.

also reveals the possibility of other paths through the game, multilinear stories, and thus the potential re-playability of the game.

Building on the visual and narrative mapping within *Detroit: Become Human*, the game can also be mapped temporally. This does not mean tracing the narrative progression of the game but rather combines the information gathered about the place and plot to analyze this Detroit city imaginary for parallels to historical events within the city. For this purpose, the analysis of typologies and palimpsests can be employed. The game labels Detroit as the “Android City.” This moniker designates a type closely connected to notions of Detroit as the Fordist City, the Motor City, and the city in ruins. On a palimpsestic level, *Detroit: Become Human* layers its narrative atop existing streets and landmarks and the historical significance of these locations. This form of orientation within the game depends on players’ previous knowledge. Nonetheless, it offers the opportunity to learn about these types of movements and, if a player is ‘in the know,’ this temporal orientation can guide gameplay decisions towards a successful completion of the game’s possible plots. However, players or researchers could also critically look at the temporal layering and grounding the game practices and the sometimes-inconsiderate allusions to the discrimination of minorities this entails.

In conclusion, the technique of orientational mapping as analyzed with regard to *Detroit: Become Human* therefore allows for an enhanced gameplay experience that works through visual, temporal, and narrative orientation. This gameplay experience exceeds the goal of mere successful completion of the game by enriching the fictional city imaginary of Detroit with features of its real-life location. Simultaneously, the players’ awareness of the operational workings of the game is raised during the playing of the game.

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DOI: 10.1515/9783110675184-010

URN: urn:nbn:de:hbz:465-20230630-122337-4

Borosch, Juliane. "Detroit: Become Human – Orientational Mapping in the City and (Hi)Story".
In: *VideoGames and Spatiality in American Studies*, edited by Dietmar Meinel, Berlin, Boston:
De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022, pp. 153-166. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110675184-010>

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