

The Biopolitics of the Android in *Humans*

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Critical discussions on fictional doubles tend either to rely upon theories such as psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny, postmodern theory and Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, or cultural theories of identity and representation that view the double as a metaphor for the marginalized Other. This article seeks to complement these approaches by drawing upon theories of biopower and biopolitics in relation to the British TV series, *Humans* (2015–18). Biopolitical theory stems from the work of Michel Foucault and has been developed further by theorists such as Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, Nikolas Rose, Roberto Esposito, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, among others. Foucault's work initiates a theory of political governance that explores the historical transmutation of power during modernity, from the use of repression, coercion, violence and fear of death through to the monitoring, management and optimisation of health and life itself. At first, it may seem inappropriate to apply this theory to a work of science fiction about mechanical rather than organic life. But Foucault's work itself illuminates the relevance since, as I outline below, he underscores the extent to which the human body is perceived as a machine to be designed, regulated and optimized within biopolitical discourses. Relying on his theory, this article explores the ways in which androids may be read as metaphors for the human and social body subjected to the operations of biopolitical control.

Broadcast on Channel 4 and co-produced with the American network AMC, *Humans* is set in an alternative Britain where androids – called 'synths' – are designed, sold and used as servants. The plot juxtaposes the lives of one group of humans, the Hawkins family, with a surrogate family of five synths who become sentient. Until its cancellation in 2018, *Humans* was Channel 4's most successful original drama in the last twenty years. According to producer Sam Vincent, part of its strength was 'its ability to explore contemporary issues in an indirect way, via the alternative universe it's set in' (qtd McIntosh 2018). Its success depends upon achieving a sense of what Darko Suvin describes as 'cognitive estrangement', whereby the familiar settings of contemporary Britain are rendered uncanny through the creation of the synths: the 'city, suburban, and rural landscapes are quotidian, though the synths glide through them eerily' and their 'shockingly bright eyes and their physical movements mark them as uncanny entities' (Holmstrom 2019: 134). But, even more pertinently, the success of *Humans* lies in its preoccupation with 'the quintessential myth of contemporary Technoculture' (Csicsery-Ronay 2008: 262), the technological Singularity. Although the concept originated in the 1950s with the work of

mathematician John von Neumann, it gained renewed currency after a 1993 address by the science fiction writer Vernor Vinge at the NASA Lewis Research Institute, where Vinge anticipated ‘the end of the human era’ at some time between 2005 and 2030, when technological or biological ‘superhuman intelligence’ will ‘drive progress’, replacing human life as we know it with some new form of superhumanity at ‘a point where our old models must be discarded and a new reality rules’ (Vinge 1993). Since then, the concept has received increasing attention within technoscientific speculation and speculative writing to the extent that the ‘post-Singularity narrative’ has become ‘one of the most noteworthy features of contemporary sf’ (Landon 2012: 5). *Humans* positions itself firmly within this tradition from its very first episode, when Prof Edwin Hobb (Danny Webb) directly refers to von Neumann and describes the synths as ‘the Singularity’, which he defines as ‘the inevitable point in the future when technology becomes able to improve and reproduce itself without our help’.¹ Since Hobb defines the Singularity in terms of the *reproducibility* of future technology, it has echoes with concerns that are distinctly biopolitical. The question of the reproduction, the ‘continuation of the species’ as one of the leaders of the synths, Anatole (Ukweli Roach), describes it in season 3, becomes a more prominent theme as the series develops, even as it gets entangled with other subplots involving debates on whether sentient synths constitute ‘true life’, life that is worth protecting or life that is expendable. In this thematic interest, the series also encourages a reading with regard to the work of Giorgio Agamben and his theories of ‘bare life’.

Last but not least, the drive towards the Singularity is accompanied by another development in the series: while the original focus of the plot is on the repercussions of the presence of synths for the dynamics of the patriarchal middle-class family, by the end of its third season the focus shifts to the implications of the existence of synth communities for the integrity of the nation-state. Synths, by that season, stand as metaphors for race and immigration – quite characteristically, Peter White’s review of the third season specifically describes the show as ‘Terminator meets Brexit’ (White 2019). By its end, the series has become ‘less about human frailty and AI technology gone awry than a meditation on immigration, terrorism and fear of The Other’ (Tate 2018). The original portrayal of the two sets of characters – humans and androids – as two different types of family gives way to debates surrounding ethnic and racial difference. So, if the gradual achievement of sentience is accompanied by an increasing shift of focus from class to race, the orientation of the series seems distinctively biopolitical, as it seems to suggest that ‘true’ life is racialized life, that the defining category of life itself is race – the category that ‘has been one of the central poles in the genealogy of biopower’ (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 205).

In Foucault's original conception, the term 'biopower' refers to a form of control that emerges gradually from the Renaissance onwards and is characteristic of modernity. Pre-modern power relied upon the use of coercion, violence and the threat of death exercised by the sovereign, who had the right to decide over the life or death of their subjects. The decline of feudalism and the emergence of the centralized nation-state led to the need for a new form of power that is more benign yet no less effective, one that is exercised through the preservation of life and the management of populations: 'a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations' (Foucault 1978: 137). Historical developments during the eighteenth century that Foucault identifies as formative to the emergence of biopower include: policies of intervention in birth rates and public hygiene; management of epidemics and common diseases; measures to coordinate medical care; and mechanisms of insurance for accidents and old age. These are, in the words of Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, new 'strategies for intervention upon collective existence in the name of life and health' (Rabinow and Rose 2006: 195) that signal 'the birth of biopower in modernity', 'the point at which the biological life of subjects enters politics and belongs entirely to the State' (200). Sherryl Vint suggests that 'life itself becomes the object of political governance, and political governance becomes the practice of steering the biological life of individuals and species. Technoscience, sf speculation and biopolitical practice converge in this context' (Vint 2011: 161).

The relevance of theories regarding the politicization of health, life and human biology to AI fictions becomes clearer when considering the two dimensions that Foucault identifies as fundamental to the crystallisation of biopower, one that focuses on the material body of the individual subject and another that focuses on the social body and the managed citizenry. The first dimension is the most illuminating in this context, because what Foucault refers to as 'anatomo-politics' perceive the human body 'as a machine: its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls' (Foucault 1978: 138). It is not just that the synths can be read as material embodiments of this abstract perception of the human body, in accordance with the reliance of sf on 'discourses of material symbolism' (Roberts 2000: 30). There is also a sense of historical continuity insofar as this perception emerges in the same period when 'literally hundreds of mechanics attempted to construct human automata' whose performances became 'a major attraction in the courts and cities of eighteenth-century Europe' (Huysen 2000: 202). According to Andreas Huyssen, this trend follows from a materialistic view of the human body as 'a machine composed by a series of distinct, mechanically moving

parts' (202), a view established by the seminal *L'Homme Machine* (1747) by Julien de la Mettrie, who claimed that humans are a 'self-winding machine, a living representation of perpetual motion' (Mettrie 1994: 17). Foucault himself specifically refers to those 'celebrated automata' as 'political puppets, small-scale models of power' (Foucault 1977: 137) of the disciplinary type emerging during the eighteenth century. What Huyssen describes as a 'culture of androids' then declines at the 'subsequent introduction of labouring machines, which propelled the industrial revolution' (Huyssen 2000: 203), whereas the android is appropriated by literature and presented as a nightmare or threat to human life in works by E.T.A. Hoffman and Edgar Allan Poe, among others. Huyssen's discussion highlights the biopolitical subtext of this trend insofar as 'this literary phenomenon reflects the increasing technologisation of human nature and the human body which reached a new stage in the early nineteenth century' (203). In our present moment, contemporary AI fictions literally embody a 'fundamental shift [...] in the biopolitical strategy of technical societies' (Bogard 2008: 188). If nineteenth-century hospitals exerted their control over human life through the study of dead corpses, contemporary disciplines such as biogenetics and AI research expand the exercise of biopower 'in the direction of controlling life from its inception rather than from its end' (188). Fictions about clones, androids and cyborgs narrativize this latest iteration insofar as they are fictions 'about the *birth* of zombies, not their return after death' (194).

The second dimension of biopower that Foucault discusses concentrates on the 'bio-politics of the population', specifically on 'the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity' (Foucault 1978: 138). Even if the question of the survival and reproduction of synths as a new species is a theme explored mostly in the final season, this theme is also in line with a pervasive preoccupation in *Humans* with the ways in which the existence of sentient synths complicates established perceptions and processes of birth, motherhood and care; of childhood, aging and obsolescence; and of death, memory and loss. Both dimensions that constitute modern biopolitics as theorized by Foucault find their place not only in *Humans* but also in twenty-first century technoculture where, according to Vint, 'both of these biopolitical objects are thoroughly colonized by subjects which once belonged entirely to the fictional realm' (Vint 2011: 161), subjects such as embryonic stem cells, brain-dead patients or, in the case of *Humans*, sentient androids, subjects whose constitution challenges the very definition of what counts as life or death in the first place.

The significance of biopower in the dystopian vision of *Humans* is evident since its first episodes, which explore the consequences of the synth for the

dynamics of the patriarchal middle-class family that, as Foucault observes in his essay 'Governmentality' (1978), has served as a 'privileged instrument for the government of the population' (Foucault 2002: 216). As Rémi Lenoir and Robbie Duschinsky explain, the family has 'played a significant role in the construction of middle-class life' and 'it has been implicated in the identification of each human subject as in possession of a "personal identity"' (Lenois and Duschinsky 2012: 19). The impact of the purchase of a synth on internal family dynamics is a recurring theme of the first season, even for characters outside the Hawkins family: DS Pete Drummond (Neil Maskell), for instance, feels estranged from his wife Jill (Jill Halfpenny) who relies more on Simon (Jack Derges), the synth sent by their insurance company, to look after her following a disabling accident. The very starting-point of the plot is the dysfunctional state of a family that makes the purchase of a synth seem a necessity. This role of the android is obvious from the opening credits of the first season, which include an advertiser's voiceover addressing the audience: 'Could you use some extra help around the house? Introducing the *first* family android!' The plot then begins when the father, Joe Hawkins (Tom Goodman-Hill), decides to buy a synth that will cater for household responsibilities because his partner Laura (Katherine Parkinson) is a successful lawyer whose work commitments prevent her from spending time at home and with her family. Buying a synth is '*the* best thing you will do for your family', says the salesman (Dan Testell) to Joe, who chooses a female synth, soon to be named Anita (Gemma Chan) by his youngest daughter, which is configured to a 'standard domestic profile that will cover all your basic housework'. This moment introduces a major theme of the first season that is indicative of the biopolitical orientation of the series, the conflict between biological motherhood and commodified domestic care: the early episodes show Laura feeling threatened by Anita's effortless domesticity and the increasing attachment that Sophie (Pixie Davies) feels for her. Anita cleans, tidies up, does the laundry, prepares breakfast 'the way it's supposed to be', as Joe puts it. In this respect, the series explores the potential impact of advances in AI and robotics on traditional discourses of motherhood. *Humans* directly engages with debates that have been ongoing within the feminist movement since the 1970s, such as the 'potential for women to find their professional voices and forge a career while wearing the mantle of motherhood' (Borisoff 2005: 1). The first season of the series most directly relies on the female android in order to engage with further feminist themes, such as the objectification, sexualisation and abuse of women: Anita is used in 'adult mode' by Joe and lusted after by his son Toby (Theo Stevenson), while the series also introduces Niska (Emily Berrington), a synth working as a prostitute who is not only sexually harassed by her creator but also abused and traumatized by her male clients. Niska escapes

after murdering a client who wants her to role-play as a scared young girl; she turns to the brothel's madam and says: 'Everything your men do to us, they want to do to you'. In this narrative strand, the series is preoccupied with the role of the android as 'fembot', a feminized and sexualized machine, resembling a woman and replacing her in romantic and sexual relationships, familiar from such films and TV series as *Blade Runner* (1982), *Ex Machina* (2014) and the contemporaneous reboot of *Westworld* (2016-).

The maternal subtext underlying the narrative of the female android is developed later in the series, as Anita turns out to be associated with motherhood in another sense. The plot reveals that her real name is Mia, and that she was kidnapped from her group and had her memory wiped so that she could be remodelled and resold on the black market. In fact, it is revealed that Mia was one of a number of synths created by David Elster (Stephen Boxer) to look after his son Leo (Colin Morgan). Towards the end of the first season, Mia, who has regained consciousness of her real identity, admits to Laura that she was made to love Leo as a mother but, at the same time, she admits: 'Being here, I understand what it means to be a family'. This is a strange statement to make when bearing in mind that the Hawkins are portrayed as a dysfunctional family throughout the entire season. But even with all its dysfunctions, the patriarchal middle-class family remains a standard reference point throughout this season that may be described as a 'synth *Bildungsroman*' whereby an inexperienced sentient android is indoctrinated into the values, patterns and lifestyles of this social class. Synths, by contrast, are portrayed as a disenfranchised working class employed to perform a very specific type of labour: one of the very first scenes of the series shows Laura returning from a business trip and walking next to synths working as ticket inspectors, cleaners, or news vendors. Typically, scenes with the Hawkins are set within their middle-class household, whereas scenes with the synths are set in parking lots, garages, railyards and abandoned factories. The distinction between human and android is thus also configured as one between middle-class and working-class labour, a reading confirmed by the last scene of the first episode, in which robotics expert Dr Ji Dae-Sun (Akie Kotabe) suggests that synths will socially liberate 'the woman in China who works 11 hours a day stitching footballs, the boy in Bangladesh inhaling poison as he breaks up a ship for scrap, the miner in Bolivia risking death every time he goes to work'.

If the competitive relationship between Laura and Anita during the first few episodes explores anxieties about the commodification of maternal care, that season also expands that interest to areas where care is institutionalized by the state through the use of synths. The subplot involving Jill is one instance of the ways in which the series explores the use of AI for biopolitical practices

such as insurance and medical care. A more central subplot involves George Millican (William Hurt), who suffers from memory loss and tremors following a stroke and is visited by his case worker Lindsay Kiwanuka (Ellen Thomas) in order to review his 'assigned care unit', an original 'D-series' synth that he is legally obliged to have replaced with an upgraded model. The care services are portrayed as monitoring and disciplining their clients; Millican refers to them as 'Nanny State Gestapo' and his new synth Vera (Rebecca Front) as 'not a carer' but 'a jailer'. Through these subplots, *Humans*' preoccupation with biopolitics emerges as symptomatic of an era of 'bio-capitalism' that industrializes 'the (re) production and care for human and non-human life in all its natural and cultural aspects' (Klinger 2018: 324).

This theme is also addressed in the second-season storyline, in which AI scientist Athena Morrow (Carrie-Anne Moss), who has been working with limited state funding, eventually agrees to work for the wealthier global corporation Qualia. Whereas this subplot explores the tensions between the biopolitics of the nation-state and those of corporate institutions, it also reveals a further interest in the question of embodiment: Athena has managed to upload the consciousness of her daughter Jenny prior to her death and is currently conducting research on transferring that consciousness to a new body. This storyline follows conversations between Athena and her daughter's consciousness, referred to as Vee (Chloe Wicks), stored in a computer terminal. The project leads to a series of failed attempts to download Jenny to a synthetic body until Vee tells Athena that she prefers to transfer to another network: 'I began as Jenny. [...] But I'm not her. Not anymore. I'm something else'. Embodiment becomes an even more prominent theme of the series through the character of Karen (Ruth Bradley), a sentient synth who has lived separate from the rest of the group, 'passing' as a human police officer, DI Voss, and who ultimately strives for embodiment as a human being. Karen is revealed to be the synth created by Elster to replace his dead wife Beatrice and be a mother figure for Leo. When Leo rejected her, Elster, realizing he had gone too far, tried to kill Karen but couldn't do it, so told the rest of the synths that Karen was dead before committing suicide. During the first two seasons, Karen has a relationship with her colleague Pete but struggles to come to terms with her android self and her relationship with a human. For example, although in episode 3.1, Karen describes the human body as 'wasteful, chaotic, expressive', in episode 2.5, she exclaims, 'I'll never have a child. We'll never grow old together'. Two episodes later, Karen approaches Athena and asks her to transfer her consciousness to a human body: 'I don't want to wear a dead woman's face anymore. [...] I can't eat, I can't dream, I can't have a child. I can't die'. The contradictions and emotional tensions within the synths' relationship to corporeality and embodiment, rather than their

technological superiority and sophistication, is most indicative of the central place of biopower in the series' dystopian vision.

Karen's tragedy is set against issues directly relevant to the biopolitical concerns that inform the series, such as corporeality and embodiment, life and death, motherhood and reproduction, but also aging and obsolescence. These last two themes occur from the beginning of the series, with the subplot involving Millican's attempts to prevent the replacement of his old malfunctioning synth, Odi (Will Tudor), because he has become attached to it for retaining memories of his dead wife. The introduction in the second season of synthetic children manufactured and sold by Qualia develops the theme of aging further. Karen adopts one of the children, Sam (Billy Jenkins), and develops a maternal affection towards him. Karen realises, however, that she cannot put herself in harm's way for Sam if he is under threat due to a 'block' that Elster added to her root code in order to ensure she would not take her own life as Beatrice did. For Karen, the fact that she cannot sacrifice herself for Sam means she cannot be a true mother, in a plot detail that reproduces what Sarah Arnold describes as the discourse of 'the Good Mother', 'a particular and popular discourse of motherhood that valorizes self-sacrifice, selflessness and nurturance' (Arnold 2013: 37). Karen keeps Sam's existence secret from the public, but in episode 3.4, they find themselves in the midst of a hostile crowd that suspects the child may be an android. Karen reveals herself to be a synth in order to distract them so that the child can run away, and she is beaten to death, thus sacrificing herself in a gesture that makes her feel more authentically human. This closure, however, is nothing but another iteration of what Berit Aström terms 'the dead-mother trope' that is symptomatic of the 'symbolic annihilation of mothers on film and television' (Aström 2015: 597). After Elster's and Millican's wives, Karen becomes one more of those 'mothers [that] are routinely removed from narratives, through the re-circulation of a set of themes and clichés, forming a very resilient trope of the dead/absent mother' (594).

The third season redirects this preoccupation with the politics of reproduction away from issues of class and gender and more towards questions on the survival of the species, in which all the synths who were awoken after Day Zero act as metaphors for race and immigration. In a sense, this metaphor had always been visible from the beginning of the series via the casting decisions made for the characters, in accordance with Channel 4's minority mandate: the synth characters are an ethnically diverse cast whereas all major human characters are performed by white actors. But even in its engagement with this theme at the level of plot, *Humans* reproduces major themes and motifs identifiable in narratives of the racial Other: direct references to Anita as a 'slave' by Mattie in episode 1.1; imagery of handcuffs in a scene where a

synth is locked in a wardrobe by two kids who are harassing her at the moment when she gains consciousness in episode 2.5; and scenes of synth lynching that encourage direct comparisons with the jazz song 'Strange Fruit' (1939) in episode 3.1. In the same episode, we see that children at school, like the one that Sophie attends, are taught to discriminate between 'safe' and 'dangerous' synths by the colour of their eyes, a physical discrimination that is reproduced three episodes later, where docile, orange-eyed synths are not allowed in the railyard where sentient, green-eyed synths are based, because this might be seen as offensive and disrespectful. Further patterns of racist discourse that are replicated in *Humans* include the use of insulting nicknames for the racial Other, like 'dollies' or 'Barbies' – expressions described as 'robophobic' – or the description of humans by some synths as 'soft-brains', which is described as an 'anthropophobic' type of language.

The race metaphors become even more pronounced through the reiteration of typical arguments related to fears of immigration, whereby the replaceability of human labour by mechanical labour and its implications for efficiency and cost intersect with arguments about immigrant cheap labour. For instance, in episode 1.5, a policeman tells the two officers that if Niska hurts one more person, they will be replaced with a synth twice as pretty and at a fraction of the cost. Similarly, when in episode 2.2, Ed (Sam Palladio), who owns the café where Mia works, tells his employee Danny (Eric Kofi-Abrefa) that she will do the job better and at a lower cost, Danny jokingly accuses Ed of 'anthropophobic discrimination'. Joe is also made redundant as he can be replaced by a synth and has to join a 'back-to-work' scheme, whereas episode 3.1 includes a scene with a homeless man on the street holding up a sign reading 'Synth took job'. The metaphor is further developed when green-eyed synths are reported arriving in Britain by sea because, as one of them tells Mia and Niska, 'we're being purged in our own country but heard there were safe places for our kind here'.

Furthermore, through the use of specific characters and plot details, the series also dramatizes the effects of governmental policies, such as assimilation, segregation and integration, in response to multiculturalism. The second season already includes anti-synth pressure groups with titles such as 'We Are People' and anti-synth rallies resonating with slogans such as 'Humans First' or 'Flesh and Blood'. By the time of episode 3.2, news bulletins announce that Scandinavian countries are trialling integration with synths. The second season ends with Joe leaving his family in order to move to a synth-free community, the village of Waltringham, described by Laura as a 'backward-looking bubble pretending the future's not happening'. But it is mostly at the level of characterisation that different strategies towards diversity are represented: Mia believes more in integration with humans whereas Niska is the most radical of the original group

of synths, who is more in favour of segregation and the celebration of difference. As the series expands beyond the original synth characters, so two factions of synths emerge: one, led by Max (Ivanhoe Jeremiah), preaches non-violence and reconciliation in ways reminiscent of Martin Luther King, whereas the other, led by Anatole, endorses violent protest and the separation from humans in an echo of the politics of Malcolm X.

The extent to which the representation of the android as a metaphor for the racial Other is informed by biopolitical discourses is highlighted by the fact that what does unite the two leaders is the pressing issue of the reproduction of their species. At the start of the third season, Max gloomily speculates upon the extinction of the synths because their bodies are finite and they cannot procreate: 'In fifty years we'll be gone'. For Anatole, in the new world that he envisions, where synths will be in power, the first thing he suggests they will need to focus on is 'the question of reproduction. The creation of new consciousness. The continuation of the species'. These anxieties become more prominent during this last season because, after Day Zero, synths have been segregated by the state in separate spaces, such as abandoned railyards, and are denied access to spare parts or electrical power. The state has thus adopted a policy that relies on a type of power that operates not through 'the right to take life or let live', which was the power of pre-modern thanatopolitics, but through 'the right to make live or let die', which is the operation of biopower (Foucault 2003: 241). These creatures have therefore been reduced to what Giorgio Agamben calls 'bare life', expendable life, the life of the *homo sacer*, the type of individual whose killing may be deemed as neither homicide nor sacrifice. Agamben draws a distinction between two different forms of life, *zoē* and *bios*: *zoē* refers to 'the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animal, men, or gods)', whereas *bios* refers 'the form or way of living proper to an individual or group' (Agamben 1998: 1). If *bios* refers to legitimized social life, then *zoē* refers to animal life, life reduced to its pure materiality or, in Agamben's terms, 'bare life'. Biopolitics, for Agamben, consists precisely in 'the politicization of bare life' (4), whereby the state maintains its power through the violent exclusion of specific individuals and populations. A person who is forcibly reduced to *zoē* becomes, for Agamben, a 'homo sacer', a category he borrows from Roman law that refers to someone who 'may be killed and yet not sacrificed' (8), whose 'entire existence is reduced to a bare life stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him [sic] without committing homicide' (183). For Fani Cettl, writing on the biopolitics of *The Hunger Games* (2008), 'the decision on which human life is made expendable depends on deciding which humans in the polis are marked as less valued than human and thus closer to the supposed animal or natural life or *zoē*' (Cettl 2015: 142). Since the state's actions toward the

synths treat them in animalistic terms, it is possible to extend this argument to artificial forms of life.

There is already a set of dystopian fictions that portray doubles, such as clones, as material embodiments of bare life. Recent examples include Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and Michael Bay's film *The Island* (Bay 2005), where clones are created and their organs harvested for a world that operates according to 'a form of power that does not need to exhibit force' (Fisher 2012: 31). *Humans*, on the other hand, includes efforts to recognize sentient synths as creatures that not only possess *zoē* but also *bios* through subplots such as the one in the beginning of the second season, when Niska requests that she be put on trial like a conscious, sentient creature, or the one of the third season that involves the commission by the British government of an independent inquiry after Day Zero, with the aim of issuing a binding recommendation on the treatment of conscious synths. Accordingly, the impending extinction of synths is portrayed precisely through their forceful reduction to *zoē*. Large-scale genocide becomes a major plot theme in the third season, through the government's 'Project Basswood': a plan to cut the power to all synth communities, preventing them from recharging, followed by the sudden restoration of power in the hope that an electrical surge will overload their chargers, thereby committing mass genocide. Behavioural scientist Neil Sommer (Mark Bonnar), who is involved in the project, justifies it to Laura in terms that make the allusions to race, immigration and the nation-state even more pronounced: 'The British people have the right to defend their communities'.

Although the cancellation of *Humans* has left the narrative hanging, at the same time its three-act structure and the gradual shift of attention from the individual to the community gives the series a coherence that might have been elaborated if the series had continued. In its exploration of the pervasiveness of biopower in dystopianism in general, and in the figure of the android in particular, *Humans* is indicative of contemporary trends in dystopian fiction. A reading of the series only encourages the need for further research on the relations between biopolitics, sf and dystopia.

Endnote

¹All subsequent reference to the series episodes will take the form of season and episode number (e.g. 1.1).

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