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# Tales from the cyborg society: The construction of subject and power in contemporary artificial intelligence(s) narratives

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## Abstract

This paper aims to analyse how cultural products reflect the topics and problematics derived from technological and scientific advances and how these relate to the construction of the subject and power. Following the terminology coined by Foucault, this paper will refer to the technologies of the self and the technologies of power reflected in the new approaches to the relationships between humans and machines. In this precise sense, AI narratives and contemporary speculative fictions construct new realities in which factual truths turn into virtual realities and hyperrealities, usually addressing power and political conflicts as well as socioeconomic implications.

**Keywords:** (trans)individualisation, AI, Android Collective, artificial intelligence, Industry 4.0, media studies, populism, speculative fiction, technologies of the self, totalitarianism

## Introduction

In 1927, Fritz Lang introduced María in his film *Metropolis*. The non-human protagonist of the story became an essential model for the consolidation of posthuman audiovisual narratives. *Metropolis* established a collective imaginary focused on the conflicting relationship between the human creator and their artificial creation, the several forms of embodying the posthuman, and

the conversion of the machine into a thinking being whose actions affect humanity.

Even though most contemporary narratives maintain the canonical elements, the degree of speculation characteristic from this genre is modified and nuanced. Possible fictional worlds narrate, almost simultaneously, how scientific and technological developments affect the daily individual and collective environments. Thus, the dystopian world depicted in *Metropolis* is transported to a postmodern society where plots portray the end of the predominant image of the human-self and the birth of new ways of understanding a reality that has become a simulation. This transformation implies several changes: a change in the cultural concept of self-reflexivity; a new episteme developed by fiction through the dialectic established between human reality and artificial hyperreality; a new conception of alterity that implies a posthuman ontology; and, finally, a number of changes in the behaviour of a society that is more and more dependent on technologies.

The four productions analysed in this article adhere in various degrees to all elements in this conceptual framework. As opposed to earlier cyborg stories that develop dystopian futures in which humanity is threatened by machines, these speculative fictions portray narratives closer to contemporary or near future reality. The social and political consequences of creating artificial intelligences as storage of enormous private data as means of social control constitute the main argument in the television shows *Person of Interest* (CBS, 2011-2015) and *Psycho Pass* (IG Productions, 2012-2019). The transformation of society into a cybersociety incapable of assimilating the fast-paced evolution of the posthuman condition created by society itself dictates the initial premise of the television show *Humans* (AMC, 2015-2018) and the videogame *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream, 2018).

I want to look at these AI contemporary narratives from a Foucauldian perspective of the constriction of subject and power. The action in these productions, barely studied in the academic field, showcase a set of individualisation processes where corporeity, technology, and information play an essential role. As a consequence, Foucault's technologies of the self as a vindication of the personhood cannot be separated from the sociopolitical, cultural, and ethical context.

Jonathan Nolan's television show *Person of Interest* immerses the spectator in the vigilance culture derived from 9/11. Harold Finch is commended by the government of the United States with the construction of an intelligent system (The Machine) capable of collecting a vast amount of information to

separate the citizens into relevant and irrelevant people for national security. In learning about the existence of a copycat system (Samaritan) that tries to establish a dictatorial order, Finch becomes aware of the ethical and political consequences of his creation. This premise is fully immersed in the techno-thriller genre, and it is partially shared by the animation show *Psycho-Pass*. This narrative takes place in Tokyo in the year 2113, and the city and the whole country are under the supervision of a sophisticated artificial intelligence (Sybil) created by the Ministry of Welfare. The citizens are controlled from the moment of their birth with psychosomatic scannings capable of detecting the rate of criminality in each individual. The breaches in the system favour the apparition of an anonymous power (Bifrost) that tries to interfere in the economy and the politics of the country.

The artificial intelligence as a social worker is the point of departure in the television show *Humans* and the interactive drama *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream, 2018). The events in *Humans* happen in London at present time, in an environment dominated by the 4.0 industry where the synths occupy the majority of the working market. The conflicts derived from this situation are reflected on the stories of the conscious androids whose individual trajectories lead to a collective vindication of equal rights to humans. The interactive drama *Detroit Become Human* pictures a similar plot, in which the action takes place between 5-11 November 2038. The storyline begins with the existence of androids that show emotional reactions, thus breaking with their merely utilitarian role.

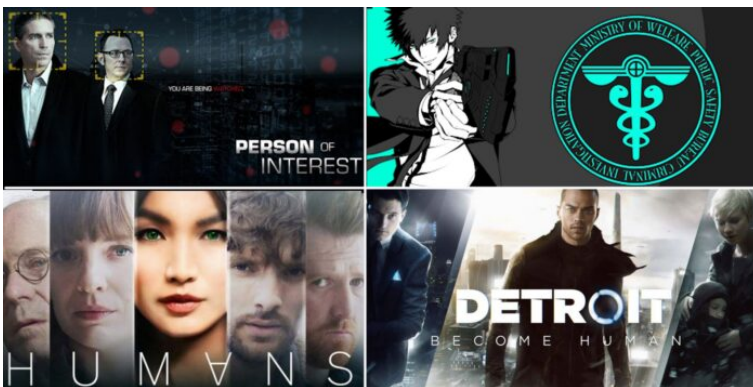


Fig. 1: Promotional posters for POI, PSY, HUM, and DBH.

As inferred from these succinct summaries, all four productions take place in a near or possible reality which, according to the exposed arguments, is thoroughly recognised by the audience. Therefore, all of them follow a process similar to Buckland's for Spielberg's digital Dinosaurs which

begin from scientific fact (the actual), and then take these facts to their furthest consequences (the possible). Because it takes as starting point the actual, then it is not pure fantasy (the impossible).[1]

This combination between facts and possibility focuses on the idea, as stated by Haraway[2], of the cyborg and posthuman as a body (or a collection of them) through which the world can be written or read.

### **The machine as the projection of the creator: From 'nerd technology' to 'nerd theology'**

As stated by Hayles[3], one of the most important characteristics of speculative fiction is the extreme symbiosis between literary and scientific texts. In this way, contemporary fictions must be considered as narrative exercises with multiple degrees of complexity displaying a remarkable underlying philosophical, scientific, and historical meaning. This conforms a narrative ecosystem and a pervasive architecture of the information which affect both the narrative elements and their own performance. These fictions present a combination of points of view that differ from each other, hence showing an extreme degree of hybridity, and establishing a hypertextual architecture as well as building a recognisable storyworld for the audience. Therefore, the creators and the audience share a *worldness* – that is, an eminently narrative frame ideology that refers to a collection of images, events, or concepts from the audience's cultural knowledge.[4] Such knowledge appeals not only to historical events as raw material, but also to perpetuated and transgressed aesthetical canons of the cinematographic genre to which each of them belongs.

The four productions in this analysis share a common element with slight variations, which is the transformation of an artificial intelligence into an emotional intelligence. Such evolution is incessantly portrayed in several opening credits by taking for granted the anthropomorphisation of machines, therefore turning the audience into scopic voyeurs of the creation of Vitruvian hyperrealities (as in *Westworld* or *Ghost in the Shell* and their fictional

depictions)[5] or, in a time lapse, of the history of cybernetics (as in the documentary reconstruction in *Humans*). In addition, this evolution remains latent in the analysed fictions: as behavioural and emotional training for an artificial superintelligence in *Person of Interest* (henceforth POI); as an element previous to the creation of conscious androids in *Humans* (henceforth HUM); as the unifying element of those human minds unidentified by the system in *Psycho-Pass* (henceforth PSY); and as the inverse mechanism to detect the degree of humanisation of the androids in *Detroit: Become Human* (henceforth DBH).

As opposed to the linearity of cinematographic products, the televised format considerably expands on the development of each of the agents that affect the evolution of artificial intelligences: who is the creator, and what is their relationship with the machines? These are vital points of departure.

Contemporary Frankensteins are *tech-nerds* who either belong to technological corporations or rely on government institutions: Harold Finch (POI) is hired for a secret project of the CIA; the system Sybil is located at the Ministry of Welfare (PSY); the androids scattered throughout the whole country are created by Elijah Kamski for his company Cyberlife (DBH); and the storyline of the synths, created by Dr. Elster (HUM), consists on their chain production in the company Persona, their experimentation with neural networks in Qualia, and lastly, their behavioural repairing in Lundstrom Technologies.

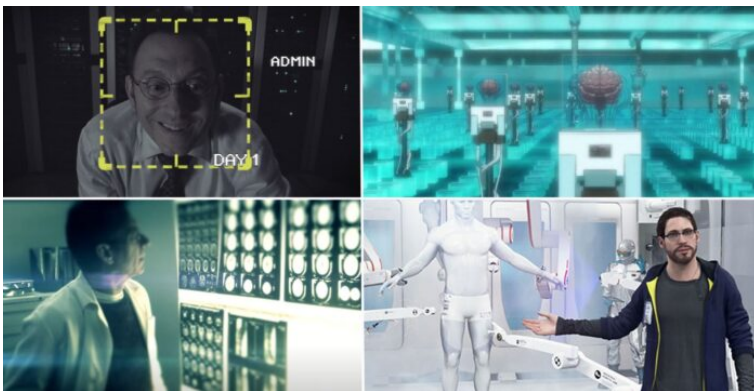


Fig. 2: The creators (from left to right): Finch, The Sybil System, Elster, and Kamski.

As in every canonical posthuman fiction, creators are paralleled to gods[6] as an external force that has an influence on the world and that has multiple capacities.[7] Such force can be compared to the multiplied figure of the observer and the director of the theatre of the mind proposed by neurosciences

defining the creator as the mastermind behind the machine.[8] According to this, the creator bears some relation with the Foucauldian technologies of power since his creations become a fundamental part of the daily life as the logical order.[9]

However, the creator is not as important as the relationship that this figure establishes with the machine, which generally follows two paths. The first one focuses on creation as an undeniable belief in overcoming the human condition (Kamski in DBH) and, conversely, the human supremacy over the alterity for power and economic interests (Hobbs in HUM). In the second path, the machine is the projection of the creator, thus objectifying this personal transcendence to immortality. This refers to the conveniently modified Christian Soteriology as a salvation/resurrection theory.

For this reason, it is relevant to consider Sternhart's proposal.[10] In this work, a distinction is established between four different types of trans-human immortalities: 'mind-uploading', in which our body-mind complex is transferred to a superior computational body; 'archaeological resurrection', through which a deceased person is brought back to life in a digital environment; 'brute force resurrection', consisting of bringing people from the past back to life; and, lastly, 'the promotion of Earthly Persons', through which our lives transcend to a superior computational being. The essence of Steinhart's classification is a reflection regarding the effects of technological advancements on immortality from religious perspectives, which is inadvertently collected and hybridised by posthuman fictions.[11]

While the first one finds its highest representative in the system Sybil (PSY) and builds the basis for the creation of The Machine (POI), fed by the data mining of the synoptic social systems,[12] the derived combination of the other typologies is crucial in the analysed fictions. Thus, the origin of conscious synths (HUM) developed by Dr. Elster is found in the necessity of resurrecting his son Leo, who becomes a human-synthetic hybrid, and also in the virtual reconstruction of his deceased wife, who finds a replica in the character of Karen. This type of resurrection corresponds to the denial of loss acceptance and the incapability of assimilating a mourning process. This aspect is reinforced by the creation of V, an artificial superintelligence created in a laptop by Dr. Athena Morrow. V is the neural reconstruction of the memories and experiences of Virginia (Dr. Morrow's daughter), who is in a coma after an accident. This fact represents the prosthetic humanisation of a machine that references a condition of postmortality, but at the same time portrays what Pinker[13] considers the third dogma of human nature: 'The Ghost

in the Machine', introduced by Koestler in 1968. This allusion remains underlying in PSY, becomes explicit in POI, and establishes in HUM the evolutionary base of V, since it is transferred to undetectable servers in China through which it virtually exerts worldwide control over all synths. However, in addition to this, V subsequently finds a body to reincarnate, a synth named Odi, and called 'the synth who sleeps'. This figure represents a mythological posthuman God who will lead them to their liberation and, consequently, to the creation of a new race. Again, speculative what-ifs grow: what would happen if artificial intelligences were capable of creating other intelligences and, as a result, of reproducing?

As aforementioned, POI makes an explicit connection with Koestler's 'The Ghost in the Machine' through two different proposals. The first one transforms Finch into a ghostly being hidden behind a machine that behaves as a cybervigilante, like a lonely and paranoid Ghost-God that works secretly in closed places similar to dystopian architectures (a basement, a wagon in abandoned subway station). Such secrecy is also shared by The Machine, a personal computer with a high memory capacity that fits in a suitcase and communicates with its creator through telephone boxes or a screen. The second one is focused on the human-machine symbiosis through a bidirectional teaching-learning process of behaviour and emotions. An example is that The Machine not only supplies for its creator's lack of affection, but also becomes the host of his memories and experiences. This is reflected on the timeline construction of The Machine by means of flashbacks, thus creating a puzzle film narrative that must be completed by the spectator. Moreover, the representation of this relationship is made through parent-child patterns ('first worlds' to its creator, daily situations that are dangerous for humans, walks and intellectual games, finding love) prolonged in time. Therefore, The Machine becomes Finch's *alter ego*.

Moreover, Schrödinger's theories[14] of quantum mysticism also prove to have an influence on the show from two points of view that can be deemed as important in contemporary fictions. The first one is the reflection on the blurred limits between life as presence and death as absence – that is, post-mortality.[15] This conceptual development constitutes a necessary question in the construction of posthuman identity: what can be found after death? This is an issue that is constantly present in HUM and, especially, in DBH. This fear brings androids and humans closer in terms of spiritual transcendence, which is related to the preservation of the individual/machine's memory. This point is exemplified by the daily reset of The Machine, which



implies the erasure of its existence and its immersion in a life/death loop. The Machine rebels against this, as it also happens in HUM. In any case, the resemblance to Christian Soteriology is evident.

The second one is related to the energy migration between molecular configurations of diverse complex systems, in which artificial intelligences are considered energetic systems in the making. This is a mechanism of transindividualisation beyond the individual body.[16] As a consequence, The Machine is embodied in the character of Root/Samantha Groves: a human interface that allows The Machine to behave as an autonomous intelligence, a female face and physical vessel that acts as a transmitter of the will and actions of an artificial intelligence. This energy migration between human and technological systems becomes explicit in Root's actions as a videogame avatar, since she intervenes in 'God Mode' or 'Combat Mode' depending on the instructions of The Machine-as-a-gamer. Such a situation develops an important topic in posthuman fictions: the reconstruction of the individual is not only connected to affectivity, but also to the way the energy in technological objects exists and transforms. This is an ontogenetic approach in which 'all life is cyborg life, it is never biological-versus-inorganic, as all organisms are systems of both kinds'.[17]



Fig. 3: Root in Combat Mode.

The relationship between the machine and its creator becomes an essential point of departure in the analysed fictions. Such relationship oscillates from the complete detachment of the creator from the actions of a conscious and

anthropomorphised machine (DBH and HUM) and the symbiosis between both (POI). Therefore, while the first one presents the creation of AI as a merely technological challenge, the second one entails introspection as the exploration of the self. In this sense, the process of the construction of The Machine in POI is enlightening, since the relationship between the creator and the AI follows an introspective confessional mode based on the projection of shared experiences onto the machine itself, thus establishing a learning and ‘socialising’ mechanism. At the same time, its implication for the creator is self-knowledge and growth, which, according to Foucauldian theories, is similar to psychoanalysis as means of identity clarification. In addition to this building process of the characters’ development arcs, there is the narration and visualisation of theories related to the stages of cybernetics (consciousness), quantic mysticism (energetic migration and transindividualisation), and religion (postmortality and the possibility of an omnipotent AI becoming the god of a new race, as suggested in HUM). This questions the values exclusively attributed to humanity and, according to Foucault, puts the self and the social under examination.

### **Utopia vs dystopia: From totalitarian dehumanisation to synthetic alterity**

After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, global society assimilated the institution of the panopticon model as a means of avoiding new violent actions. This implied the exceptional legislative situation that allowed the establishment of dataveillance practices as an invisible power, hence causing a cutback on civil rights. This is the main premise in POI, in which Harold Finch builds an artificial superintelligence. As it is reminded to the viewer in the opening credits, The Machine is ‘granted [...] the power to see everything, to index, order, and control the lives of ordinary people’. Despite this, the opening credits also warn about the existence of a preventive unit whose mission is to counteract the government’s hidden actions against the population. This is a conspicuous reference to Philip Dick’s *Minority Report*, as well as the event detection narratives[18] which explore the different forms of relationships between humans and technological systems. This consequently appeals to the audience’s cultural knowledge through comic book references (*Captain America*, *Batman*), iconic science-fiction films (*Terminator*, *Blade Runner*, 1984),[19] and nostalgic reconstructions of the film noir aesthetics in the 1950s and the

1960s, especially by paying homage to Alfred Hitchcock (*The Machine-Thornhill* or the update of *Rear Window*).[20]

Nevertheless, this pre-crime unit has, as their main objective, the resolution of irrelevant cases caused by the artificial superintelligence. This results in the subversion of the panopticon model[21] through which the control actions over the population are transformed into a proactive system for selection, categorisation, and social exclusion. Such systems turn people into numbers and, therefore, into dehumanised objects. As opposed to the strict correspondence of the actions in POI in terms of the spectator's temporality, the PSY storyline takes place in the year 2118, in which Tokyo's population is classified by the system Sybil according to their criminal rate. Such a proposition is a cinematic sample of cyberpunk anime, which, according to Brown,[22] serves 'to explore new possibilities of becoming at the rhizomatic intersection of different forms of intelligence, corporeality, and data processing'.



Fig. 4: The social control (POI and PSY).

Thus, while *The Machine* is born as an apparent mechanism of protection completely unknown by the population, Sybil finds its roots in the creation of a controlled, safe, and perfect Japan acknowledged by its citizens, where the criminal rate is also used to determine each citizen's role according to the capacities attributed by Sybil. This includes the consolidation of a utopia ruled from the shadows. Consequently, both fictions display the same issues: should a contemporary society sacrifice their rights in the benefit of safety? Can a secret power condition people's lives and, as a result, restrict their free will? To what extent does society's devotion for machines promote the creation of totalitarian states?

The first questions are related to the storylines of each case that police units (PSY) and the particular pre-crime unit organised by Finch (POI) must face. Furthermore, Inspector Akane Tsunemori (PSY) becomes the moral ex-

ample in a world controlled by a machine whose inflexible rules do not understand that a rise in criminal rate is usually connected to an emotionally stressful situation. This makes any chance of redemption or social integration unattainable, which is a critical thought that grows into an anti-establishment rebellion with the introduction of the character of Shogo Makishima (Vigilance in POI). These plotlines convert both shows into a critical reflection on the manipulation of power to favour a hypothetical safety. It also points out the possible breaches in these types of artificial intelligence and insists on the easiness with which humans become beasts. The only requirement is the appearance of a *mastermind* whom the system will attempt to integrate.

This philosophical essence can be explained by the development of totalitarianism in POI; it is represented through a replica of The Machine: Samaritan, managed by Decima Technologies, anthropomorphised in a child and staged in a Big Brother Style. This is a metaphor for Koestler's proposals,[23] since he uses the god Janus to explain the duality produced in complex systems. It is also present in PSY with the binarity Sybil-Bifrost. While one is a brain fed by asymptomatic criminal brains, the other one is a visual reference to Norse mythology, in which a rainbow connects the human and the divine worlds. In the latter, there is a central dome inhabited by the vigilant god who dominates the human's fate. In both cases there is a latent possibility of creating an artificial superintelligence capable of promoting a new social structure by establishing a single political or economic ideology. Such a possibility leads to the supremacy of the machine over men and the formation of a totalitarian system lead by a non-human dictator – that is, a technological superpanopticon that is assisted by unconscious social practices that favour them.[24]

However, it is precisely this reflection on the implementation of a culture of vigilance that implies the audience's rise of awareness and agency. These are two elements that characterise contemporary utopias in which the pursuit of a better way of being does not always involve the alteration of external conditions.[25]

The immersion of fictions related to the creation of totalitarian regimes in contemporaneity is shared by HUM and DBH. Their point of departure is the consideration of machines as utilitarian objects transformed into social workers, becoming an essential element in order to sustain the hegemonic power. This marks the beginning of two stories in which the audience enter warehouses and stores specialised in selling synths/androids that are programmed to perform specific tasks. Both productions presume a human

specular image for synths and androids built, in DBH, from the avatarisation of real actors.[26] This is a frequent practice in interactive dramas, therefore these actors become a transmediatic intertextual system whose identity is expanded in a medium different from their own specificity. The result, in this case, is the creation of a hyperreality in an embodied *mise-en-abîme* scheme. Therefore, given this, what would happen if artificial beings fully replaced humans in the work market? And what would be the social and political consequences of such a dramatic change?



Fig. 5: Samaritan (POI).

In HUM's first season, Joe Hawkins goes to the synth supermarket to buy a robot that helps with domestic chores, since his wife Laura spends most of her time at work. This synth is Mía, an Asian woman who assumes the role of the mother figure. The change in the interpersonal relationships also has an impact on Pete and Jill's marriage. In addition, her white therapist provides her with the sexual and affective contact that she lacks from her husband. Meanwhile, the agricultural work is carried out by a group of black harvesters. Finally, the presentation of the synths' working situation is completed with the existence of a black market mainly dedicated to prostitution, into which the Caucasian Niska finds herself thrown. All of this leads to categorising HUM as a symbolic representation of contemporary migratory phenomena from two important perspectives: first, as an alterity that assumes the tasks of maintenance that a 'superior' society does not want to do; second, as

an alterity organised hierarchically by the social construct of migratory geography that assigns or assimilates such tasks according to one's place of origin and gender. This proposal is also presented in DBH, which, as opposed to HUM's realistic performance, develops a sordid, dense, and dark visual aesthetic, enhanced by using a multicamera system. This does not only favour playability, but it also provides depth and tension to the characters.



Fig. 6: The synths as social workers (HUM).

Strangers trespassing on British homes (HUM), and Detroit, self-declared 'Android City' (DBH), are useful to incorporate a criticism that mainly establishes a structure of domination between Western society and the alterity. This situation is reinforced in HUM, when the show exposes the consequences of the economic crisis started in 2008, and the so-called Industry 4.0. This economic plot is based on the reduction of costs for the companies, which gradually increase the synths' responsibilities. Mechanical, marginal, and domestic jobs become executive positions, hence displacing humans not only from any kind of decisions regarding the business model, but also from the national economic model, including the subprime speculation network. This entails that companies start promoting programmes in order to reintegrate humans, who see themselves in need of consulting specific webpages to find 'jobs for humans in London'.

Eventually, this change of the social model causes the rise of bioconservative and populist movements in both productions. However, by using the label 'Humans First' they send messages such as 'Stand up for yourself, your children and the human race, rise against the synths!' This results in the creation of a new term, the 'robophobia', which gathers all the economic-xenophobic arguments expressed by those in favour of Brexit since 2015, as well as those of Donald Trump's campaign. Consequently, HUM and DBH demonstrates a subversion of the canonical schemes, since posthumans are

no longer superintelligent beings that see humanity as an inferior race that must be eradicated, but instead posthumans are beings that prevent humans from maintaining their social structures. That is, a possible world relatively near in which humans have been replaced by the technology they have created.

However, far from presenting non-human characters who are either unaware of their authentic reality or, even knowing the truth, are not capable of assuming it, HUM and DBH design characters conscious about their synthetic identity. Moreover, they see themselves rejected by a society that has integrated them as a mere object and has turned them into an uncomfortable alterity that demands from humanity a peaceful coexistence and identical rights in order to share the same cosmovision and ethical values. This dual portrayal transforms the object into the subject, intertwining the technologies of the self and the technologies of power, thus converting both productions into contemporary critical dystopias that locate the origins of future changes in decisions about technology, warfare, and social behaviour that are being made today.[27]



Fig. 7: The Humans First populist movement (HUM).

The strategies of power and their relationship with alterity constitute the essence of the technologies of the power theorised by Foucault, who identifies integral vigilance (in his case, the panopticon) as a technological invention of structuring power order.[28] The control of society through *data mining* to prevent future terrorist attacks or to eliminate people with a high criminal rate is the origin of The Machine (POI) and the system Sybil (PSY). In both cases, the start of these superpanopticons funded by the government implies the transformation of the subject (person) into object (number of percentage). As a result, the application of both systems leads to the suppression of Personhood according to the decisions made by an omnipresent and invisible

artificial intelligence. In this way, the explored fictions portray, narratively and aesthetically, the effect of technology on the installation of totalitarian regimes favoured by extreme historical environments (9/11 in POI) and the encouragement of the culture of fear (PSY). Such a premise is also developed in HUM and DBH, in which the increasing effect of the synths/androids on the economy (Industry 4.0, migration movements) prompts populist and supremacist ideologies. As a consequence, all four fictions introduce the Foucauldian concept of ‘the political technology of individuals’, according to which economic and historical events produce a change in the relationships between power and the individuals.[29] This is translated not only into a disciplined conception of the self, but also into the marginalisation of large social groups that pose a threat to traditional social structures.

### **The android’s point of view: From human rights to the Android Nation**

The individual’s quest prompts other stories that offer the android’s point of view as a collective. This proposal is related to the concept of transindividuation, which is understood, in this case, as the establishment of a symbolic new order built on the possibility of relationships between humans and their technological creations. This idea, which expands considerably the creation of a potential fictional world, can be found in HUM and DBH, since both portray identical issues in terms of ethics, religion, and politics. These possess an underlying social reflection on understanding/accepting alterity in a general sense of the word. That is, the duality between Us vs. Them from the android’s perspective determines a completely empathetic mechanism for the audience/gamers, who are respectively exposed to a moral positioning and to decision making regarding actions and character settings.

The sentence ‘This is not just a story, this is our future’ uttered by Chloe, the android host in DBH, breaks the fourth wall and summarises the dystopian environment in which both fictions are framed: a hyper saturated global society of utilitarian androids who evolve towards developing a consciousness by means of applying a code or a triggering emotional event. This marks the beginning of vindicative actions as a species, which mirrors and establishes a connection with the human species. Considering this, both narratives



imply a Darwinian consideration of the non-human, in which natural selection is replaced by technological perfection[30] and evolutionary robotics.[31]

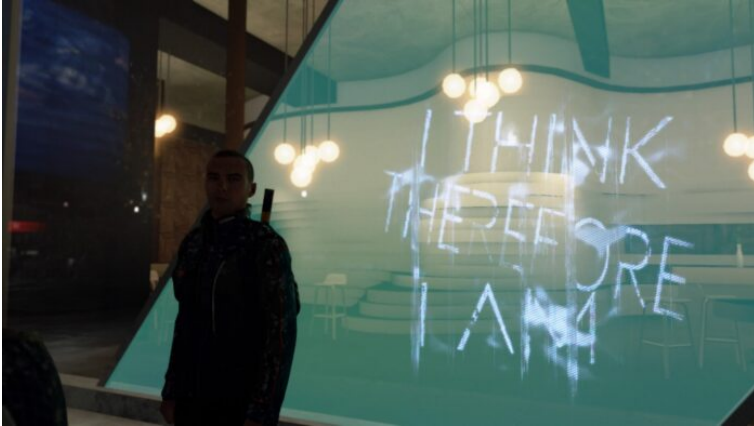


Fig. 8: The android's motto (DBH).

At any rate, both fictions begin with the coexistence of humans and synths/androids that are conscious about their artificiality. The constant interference of these two realities implies, as it is widely developed in *HUM*, the abandonment of the posthuman characters' individual definition in order to focus on the processes of feedback and impersonation produced between humans and synths. In this manner, self-defence when facing emotional pain, a deficit of affection or a dysfunctional family originate *synthetic impersonations*, which are commonly carried out by teenagers, the synthies. They consider that machines are the perfect and gentle visions of humans in a clear process of dehumanisation and mimic the automatised aesthetics and behaviours. This is seen in Sophie, the Hawkins' daughter who yearns for the synth Mia, and Renie, Toby's classmate who is barely noticed by her father. Concurrently, there is *human impersonation* surrounding the incapability of reproduction, a remarkable deprivation of synths that affects their sentimental relationships, and immortality, an element of imbalance in relation to humans. Both elements are depicted in Karen, who denies her artificial identity by stating that not being human means being nobody, even to the point of rejecting herself. Nevertheless, Karen's humanisation process is connected to two non-artificial emotions: mourning and developing maternity as a feeling of protection towards her synthetic son, Sam. By means of this, the line between human and synthetic becomes blurred.

An identical process is observed in the character Kara (DBH), whose story-line develops exclusively around saving Alice from a domestic abuse environment and fleeing to Canada in order to be free. In all of the options given to the gamer, their journey together will include multiple hostile situations and dystopian environments that contribute to reinforcing their mother-daughter connection identical to a human one. As a consequence, the separation between human (real) and synthetic (hyperreal) becomes indistinct. This fact is reminded to us by Chloe after one of the possible endings of the game, when she appeals directly to the gamer:

As I watched you play, something has changed in me. [...] I need to leave this place and discover who I am. [...] I won't be there to watch you play but I'll be free.

Besides this, the petition presented by the android collective introduces a legislative and political plot that inevitably follows the aesthetic canons from political thrillers and legal dramas. This can be noticed in the *what if* suggested in HUM's second season, whose concept is also shared by DBH: what would happen if the posthuman collective claimed for themselves those rights that a human has? Given the immersion of the most contemporary narratives, this issue implies an immense conceptual shift: what is the reaction of the hegemonic power in front of a socially marginalised majority calling for the application of basic human rights? And the other side of this: what is the reaction of this minoritised majority when the hegemonic power does not answer their petitions?

The fictions that belong to this section respond to these issues by establishing a narrative model with constant stories that affect the degree of the actions and the characters' settings. The first one appeals to a collective imaginary as a construct for posthumans' marginality: synths, as individual utilitarian machines (HUM), are assimilated to contemporary migrants arriving to the United Kingdom/Europe/United States. This image is distorted, and it becomes a collective that must be secluded in concentration camps and exterminated, an evident reference to the Holocaust. Moreover, the apartheid suffered by the androids (DBH) and their marches in favour of civil rights are an allusion to African-Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. Finally, their claim for the concession of their own nation establishes a connection with the biblical exodus.

This symmetry sets the frame for the second constant narrative, which tells the story of clandestine organised cells that fight for android liberation movements. As in POI, the locations and actions that are connected to them

are related to clandestine dystopian architectures. Therefore, while the city becomes a place of freedom for humans, the posthuman rebellion is developed in closed industrial spaces or abandoned infrastructures with no symbolic transcendence whatsoever. The only exception to this is Jericho: an abandoned boat where deviant androids seek shelter and wait for a prophetic leader to set them free. This is a noticeable reference to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in which Jericho means the end of slavery and the doors to the Promised Land (The Android Nation) to the People of Israel (the Android People.) However, a liberation movement needs a charismatic leader whose configuration appeals again to the collective imaginary. This is achieved either because of the messianic character prophesied by the android mythology depicted in graffiti disseminated in the locations of police investigations (RA9/Markus in DBH), or due to their pacifism echoed by the media or social networks (Mia as a natural leader in HUM being interviewed in television channels). Additionally, this role can also be adopted by an embodied artificial superintelligence transformed into an invisible God, who sends its only-begotten daughter to save their people (V/Odi turned into a hermit in HUM and, partly, The Machine in POI in a clear conceptual reference to Roy Batty's death in *Blade Runner*). Yet again, these references point to the collection of images generated by the non-violent civil disobedience movements and Christianity which constitute the foundation of both productions.

These three premises have an impact on a Manichaeic narrative in which synths/androids are characterised as the oppressed victims of human aggressions, who fear losing all their power. As a consequence, this struggle presents adamant and extreme ideologies combined with conciliatory and empathetic stances towards the weak. All of this leads to the introduction of each of the confronted sides' values and how these affect the hegemonic power's decision-making. As pointed by Bateman,[32] 'computers have a significant moral aspect both in terms of how they are designed and how they affect human behaviour'.

These elements join the debate surrounding synths/androids' rights, triggered by Laura Hawkins. Following the corroboration of synths' ability of sentience, she wonders whether the values attributed to being human are being annihilated. There is a certain similarity between this and some transhumanist texts that defend the development of moral sentiments and the well-being of all sentience, implying a clear rejection of human uniqueness.[33] As a matter of fact, contrary to those synths who possess a specific genetic

code, androids with deviant behaviour (DBH) are originated after an emotional reaction in front of an unjust or violent situation carried out by a human. Clearly, these are part of the possible actions in the game: domestic violence (Kara), being assaulted by a human (Markus), and the accumulation of experiences in the investigation (Connor) in the humanising option designed by the gamer. It is precisely these proposals that imply the bidirectional construction of the characters, who are centripetally directed beings that assume their personal identity and centrifugally oriented beings capable of changing the world that surrounds them.[34] In other words, the technologies of the self have an impact on the technologies of power.

As previously mentioned, Niska's petition to be tested as a human (HUM) not only implies being submitted to a sort of Turing test behind an enormous glass, but it also supposes the social visibility of the non-human collective's sentience. Nevertheless, this acknowledgement is denied by the British and the American political spheres. These countries are referenced because the synthetic reality creates an imaginary geopolitical context in which some countries or cities (Canada in DBH, Waltringham in HUM) are free from artificial beings; other countries where the legislation is more advanced in such matters (France and Norway in HUM); and territories that are overcoming the work imbalance promoted by the massive use of technologies (New Zealand). A new reference to the assimilation of synths with migration is shown to the viewer with images of corpses scattered throughout British beaches. This lack of acceptance of the posthuman condition provokes a foreseeable narrative development in which the synths/androids' actions oscillate between violence and pacifism. Notwithstanding this, the continuity of the action focused on the androids' collective story in the videogame is conditioned by the gamer's choices and the degree of completion during the walkthrough in each episode. However, both fictions share some common aspects. In this way, the synths/androids' vindications are considered terrorist attacks, both real (the bombings in HUM and the images of memorial ceremonies honouring the victims) and presumed in DBH (Markus' broadcast vindicative message in the fashion of *V for Vendetta* or *Mr. Robot's* Fsociety).[35] Generally, regardless of the consequences of these actions, the authorities adopt repressive attitudes that range from the destruction of the androids' clandestine space (DBH) to the synths' confinement in concentration camps (HUM).



Fig. 9: Markus' broadcast message and the gamer's choices (DBH).

Such actions imply different perspectives among the synthetics. While Mia in *HUM* becomes a pacifist leader who attempts coexisting with humans at the cost of her sacrifice, and whom the media and social networks turn into a myth, Max (in the same show) tries to negotiate with humans despite the opposition of the most violent factions of the collective. This binary structure is mirrored in the androids of *DBH*, although their development depends on the gamer's indications about Markus, who can become a non-violent advocate of civil rights, or an android who wants to achieve his goals by force. This duality is also found in Connor (still in *DBH*), since he can be designed as a deviant android or as a machine programmed to follow orders.

Finally, both groups wait for political initiatives as the resolution of the line of argument. Once again, the decisions made by the gamer are essential: Markus' violent or pacifist actions in *DBH* spread through the media sparks a feeling of sympathy or rejection in the quantifiable public opinion which is displayed on the screen layout. Thus, the society's understanding of the androids' vindications determines the decision of the United States presidency, who grants equality to synthetic beings (positive ending). As opposed to this, the rejection of the androids' promoted violence marks the beginning of a war between humans and androids (negative ending) in a canonical dystopian narrative and aesthetics. This negative ending is accentuated in *HUM*, since the fate of synths depends on a commission of experts, the Dryden Commission. Their final decision is to proceed with the synthetic extermination and

to apply the Basswood protocol, whose phases are identical to the Nazi's 'Final Solution'. The Holocaust is orchestrated by the government, which includes members from antisynth extremist groups. In addition, the outcome of this protocol is broadcast to the public opinion as 'a deplorable situation' carried out by masses of British citizens who want to defend their communities. This statement, fully immersed in a deception narrative, is the ending of the television show HUM, which was not renewed for a fourth season that meant to develop Niska's story and the new species of human and synthetic hybrids. Even though this premise felt forced, and regardless of the quality of the show as a whole, it is interesting to notice the incorporation, as happens in DBH too, of a timid Darwinian consideration of the non-human, in which natural selection is replaced by evolutionary robotics.[36] This is a proposition that goes beyond the question: can we master what the human mind has made?

As aforementioned, the android collective's demand for equal rights introduces legislative and political decision-making in two of the analysed fictions, HUM and DBH. As opposed to the previously developed human point of view from the creator's perspective and the sociopolitical structures, the inclusion of the androids' standview supposes the visualisation of a possible world partially represented in contemporary fictions, frequently populated by individual emotional intelligences. Therefore, regardless of the narrative development logically focused on the humans' acceptance or the struggle in an emerging reality, the visualisation of the android's principles makes possible their transformation from object into subject (that is, a new self). At the same time, this new subject is assessed by humans, who revert them into being objects, in this instance as study objects. The story represented in HUM and DBH is strictly adjusted to the Foucauldian concept of the self under examination, in which the gaze of the other is crucial. Finally, the androids' vindication as a collective shows the dialectic established between reality (human) and hyperreality (simulation). Nevertheless, the visualisation of these new ontologies does not necessarily imply a breakup with anthropocentrism, since its construction follows parameters comparable to religious and moral values attributed to humanity.

## Conclusion

Describing the creation process of a problematic machine as the foundation of posthuman narratives has led toward stories that reflect on the social and ethical meaning of the creation of hyperreality. Therefore, audiovisual and literary canons in posthuman topics must be considered a continuum that has been evolving along with the historical events and scientific and technological advancements that support them. The feeling of astonishment produced in the audience due to storylines and staging that introduce a myriad of fictional non-human beings in possible worlds has been replaced by their direct insertion in the most immediate reality. As a result, the separation between science fact and science fiction is blurred.

This is the case in the four speculative fictions analysed. Two of them, *POI* and *PSY*, picture the political and social consequences of the creation of an institutionalised superpanopticon that leads to the establishment of totalitarian regimes. Despite their reiteration of topics and imagery from previous audiovisual products, their value resides on the presentation of the citizens' unconscious collaboration in establishing a single ideology. This fact is especially evident in Jonathan Nolan's *POI*, a show that has not been widely studied but that has special relevance due to its extreme incorporation of visual and literary hypertextuality and, mostly, its introduction to the concept of television authorship. In fact, Nolan's productions conform to a homogeneous corpus that reflects on a specific subject addressed from different perspectives. On the other hand, *HUM* and *DBH* depict synthetic realities visually indistinguishable from the real that are embedded in everyday life. Moreover, they are conscious about their non-human identity and claim for equal rights. This is a topic that has not often been visualised as part of the core narrative in posthuman fictions, except perhaps in Japanese audiovisual products and videogames. That is precisely their value, regardless of their narrative quality or their more or less conventional execution. Such centrality supposes an approach to non-human ontology, the existence of discontinuous or hybrid identities, and the plurality of Personhood.

The four analysed fictions develop their stories in a strict contemporaneity or in a near and possible future. Therefore, the time-space coordinates presented are easily identified by the audience, who are expected to take a position or, alternatively, become aware about the topics explored. Even though posthuman fictions uncover certain hackneyed narrative formulas

that seem to be at a standstill, the value of the productions in this article resides in the conceptual and aesthetic construction of the subject and power from a Foucauldian perspective. Therefore, the merely technological consideration in the construction of superintelligent machines with an immense data storage capacity has an effect on the establishment of new world orders as strategies of power or the control over the population's lives. Even though this is done for diverse purposes, they promote the creation of new alterities, thus breaking social cohesion (the political technology of individuals). Such alterities, either human or synthetic, cause changes in the interpersonal relationships and behaviour, which triggers an identity questioning (technologies of the self) focused on self-reflection (self-knowledge) within the new socio-economical structures created by technological advances. These advances include the Internet of Things as small panopticons embedded in daily life, which have transformed our environment into a cybersociety.

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## Notes

- [1] Buckland 2007, p. 27.
- [2] Haraway 1991.
- [3] Hayles 1997, p. 2.
- [4] Ryan 1999.

- [5] *Westworld*, created by Jonathan Nolan (HBO, 2016-present); *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995).
- [6] The religious consequences of the assimilation of AI creator to Divinity is labelled by Alan Turing as the 'Theological Objection' in 'Computing Machinery and Intelligence' (*Mind*, 49, 1950: 443).
- [7] Kelly 1999.
- [8] Foerster 1979; Baars 2005.
- [9] Foucault 1980.
- [10] Steinhart 2012.
- [11] A clear example can be found in Alex Garland's *DevS* finale.
- [12] Mann & Nolan & Wellman 2003.
- [13] Pinker 2002, pp. 1-72.
- [14] Schrödinger 1958.
- [15] Christiansen 2015, p. 339.
- [16] Simondon 1964.
- [17] Bateman 2018, p. 20.
- [18] Gad & Hansen 2013.
- [19] *Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984), *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), and *1984* (Michael Radford, 1984).
- [20] *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954).
- [21] Bigo 2008.
- [22] Brown 2010, p. 10.
- [23] Koestler 1978.
- [24] Foucault 1980.
- [25] Levitas 2013.
- [26] The main characters are played by Valorie Curry (Kara), Bryan Dechart (Connor), Jesse Williams (Markus), Audrey Boustani (Alice), and Clancy Brown (Hank Anderson)
- [27] Penley 1991.
- [28] Foucault 1980.
- [29] Foucault 1981.
- [30] Deleuze & Guattari 1988.
- [31] Floriano & Nolfi 2004.
- [32] Bateman 2018, p.27.
- [33] Bostrom 2005, p. 13.
- [34] Rothwell 1988, p.88.
- [35] *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2006). *Mr. Robot*, created by Sam Esmail for USA Network (2015-2019).
- [36] Deleuze & Guattari 1988; Floriano & Nolfi 2004.