

Equipment as Living: Robotic Rhetorical Homology in *Humans*

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The Hawkins, a British family of five, decide to finally give in by purchasing the hottest new appliance for middle and upper-class households. To the excitement of their three children, the Hawkins purchase a humanoid robot, or synthetic, designed to serve them as a domestic worker in their home. Like many synthetics, the robot they purchase is a young and attractive individual who could be confused for a human if it were not for her bright green eyes, emotionless speech, and mechanical movements. This synth, whose name we later learn is Mia, is very different from her computerized counterparts; she is the first conscious synthetic to grace the screen in the pilot of *Humans*.

The British television show first debuted in 2015, with two more seasons following in 2016 and 2018. The series follows Mia, the Hawkins family, and several conscious synthetics as they navigate a world that is not ready for a reality where humanoid devices become sentient. The conscious synthetics spend the first two seasons hiding their true nature, avoiding government bounty hunters, and preparing for the day when their fellow robots also become sentient. Tensions arise and anti-robot sentiments swell as all the non-conscious robot laborers collectively “wake up” at the very end of the second season. The third season of *Humans*, which is set a year after all synths become sentient, brings a range of complex moral dilemmas to the forefront of the series as human beings struggle to accept and integrate conscious synths into their society. The robots face violent attacks, brutal government oversight, and hateful slurs at every turn.

While this series raises many important questions about ethics in technology and the nonfictional futures we may encounter, *Humans* is about so much more than robots. Each season of the series was released during the various stages of Brexit and the anti-immigrant discourses that prompted it. Although *Humans* never explicitly discusses racism, xenophobia, or Brexit, the show’s homologous

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relationship to contemporary British politics and social issues was so apparent that one reviewer remarked it was rife with “Brexit analogies” and “more human” than other popular robot television series like *Westworld* (Wollaston). Given the constant portrayals of otherization and movements for social change across *Humans*, this television show about humanoid devices participates in discourses about marginalization among human beings in the twenty-first century. In this essay, I approach the connection *Humans* holds with British anti-immigrant discourses that surrounded it during its creation as a rhetorical homology that presents not-quite-human equipment *as* living. I introduce this reorientation of Kenneth Burke’s equipment for living to think through not-quite-human approaches to imparting values and engaging with the space of otherness. In the case of *Humans*, this homology of otherness follows similar forms of alienation and isolation directed at British immigrants while simultaneously contesting the frame of humanity itself.

To map out this humanoid homology, I focus on the discourses of otherization in the third season of *Humans*. I primarily draw from the previous work on rhetorical homologies, critical cultural studies scholarship, and Burkean criticism. While previous applications of rhetorical homologies have thoroughly considered how supernatural films can resemble our realities, I specifically interrogate how not-quite-human characters contend more directly with issues of dehumanization. Moreover, I explain how robotic homologies compare to cultural studies of metaphors for the racialized Other. In what follows, I argue the empathic framing of humanoid characters creates homologies that challenge viewers’ discomfort and begs them to identify with the Other. However, homologies that make use of not-quite-human equipment can also reinforce troubling discourses around racialization. These tensions represent the complexity of robotic representations as a means of persuasion and social change in popular culture.

Rhetorical Homology in Burkean Terms

Among the many theoretical tools we might use to analyze media, rhetorical homology provides an especially useful lens for understanding cultural parallels. While the term homology can be traced through many disciplines of study, rhetorical homologies are “grounded in discursive qualities” (Brummett *Rhetorical Homologies: Form* 3). More specifically, Barry Brummett defines rhetorical homologies as “a formal resemblance between some aspect of discourse and some

other dimension of experience, whether that be another discourse, a real life experience, a way of using technology, and so forth” (*Rhetorical Homologies: Form* 114). Kathryn M. Olson provides a similar definition of rhetorical homologies, describing them as “a means to observe formal parallels that might indicate a larger systematic interpretive framework that rhetors discussing very different content nonetheless hold in common” (217).

Although Kenneth Burke’s work lacks a specific exploration of homology as a term, Brummett heralds Burke as one of the most notable “theoreticians of homology in the twentieth century,” given his emphasis on similarity across different texts (*Rhetorical Homologies: Form* 12). More precisely, the consistent ways dramatic Burkean terms seek similarity between situations is strongly connected to rhetorical homologies. For instance, Burke identifies the Symbol as “the verbal parallel to a pattern of experience” (*Counter-Statement* 152) that “appeals either as the orienting of a situation, or as the adjustment to a situation, or both” (*Counter-Statement* 156). The Symbol offers especially ripe material for rhetorical homologies. Like homologies, the Symbol is concerned with creating connections to experiences and situations by way of artistic metaphors. The connections Burke’s Symbol forms are incredibly political and potentially prescriptive. E. Johanna Hartelius articulates this potential for prescription by understanding the Symbol as “a ‘formula’ for how to experience” (58). As such, rhetorical homologies and Symbols alike often persuade audiences to subscribe to certain values by paralleling their situations in new ways. The comfort of familiar forms will especially arouse an audience and make them more prone to persuasion.

Literature, or the medium that might communicate the Symbol, becomes a way to configure the audience’s values and approach situations in our own lives as what Burke calls equipment for living. He invites us to conceive of the equipment literature gives us “as strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off evil eye,” among other moral decisions (Burke *The Philosophy* 304). As a result, rhetorical homologies often function as equipment for living by advocating for a certain approach to a situation. That situation can be articulated through Symbols that appear in a satisfying form for the audience.

Science Fiction Homologies in Popular Culture

Literature, and its ability to serve as equipment for living, can refer to several types of art in Burke’s view. He tells us “there is no ‘pure’ literature here. Everything is

‘medicine’” (Burke *The Philosophy* 293). Carly S. Woods argues that Burke’s use of the term medicine is a master metaphor for how literature can help to cure societal sicknesses like hate and misunderstanding. Film, and the rhetorical homologies it provides, become part of this cultural prescription to cure a broken society.

Films and television series possess potential for the kind of sensemaking that forms equipment for living. Even films set in worlds that do not or will not ever exist are equipment for audiences to address their concerns in the real world (Brummett “Electric Literature” 251). In fact, many films appeal to audiences precisely by avoiding literal depictions of everyday life and bringing viewers into fantastical worlds (Brummett “What Popular Films” 62). Science fiction, in particular, “gives us a way to first invoke and then resolve scenes of social chaos and to explore the divisions between society and the Other” (Nishime 198).

By addressing social attitudes in a type of situation, films about seemingly disparate scenarios are rhetorical homologies that advocate for particular values (Brummett “What Popular Films” 63). Those values are almost never articulated by the film itself because, “like ideology, form is most powerful when it is most invisible, and that is most of the time” (Brummett “What Popular Film” 64). So, the equipment for living that films provide through rhetorical homologies never directly represents an individual’s situation. Rhetorical homologies cannot connect with real situations too neatly given that “a discourse that was perfectly identified with experience could offer no response to that experience because a response must be different from that to which it responds” (Brummett “The Homology Hypothesis” 206). Instead, it will go through similar moves and follow a particular pattern that allows the individual to align the artwork with their experience. For instance, LeiLani Nishime argues that science fiction depictions of dystopian technological advancement parallel white anxiety about immigrants and the erasure of western culture (197). Similarly, numerous scholars posit that stories about aliens are often metaphorical representations of the racialized Other in western society (Ahmed; Greene; Nama). Robots have a similar connotation of difference given that their nonhuman status and lack of free will is evoked as a contemporary embodiment of enslavement (Atanasoski and Vora; Hampton). In some ways, the robots in *Humans* are unlike the racialized aliens and robots in previous popular culture studies scholarship. They do not come from another planet or seek to overthrow the humans. They have free will, but they do not pose a violent threat to humanity. The series is mostly shown from the robots’ perspectives and

characterizes fear towards them as unfounded. This framing situates *Humans* as a rhetorical homology with qualities that are both similar to and different from previous representations of otherness in science fiction.

(De)Humanizing Homologies

Homologies are capable of having negative impacts on marginalized human beings just as various forms of persuasion are capable of providing “bad medicine” for society (Woods). In fact, previous rhetorical homologies found in film encouraged the oppression of marginalized groups and indifference towards abusive behaviors (Salek; Winslow). Even rhetorical homologies that are understood as a social critique of power on the surface may end up participating in normalizing the hegemonic practices they sought to unpack (Salek 14). As such, homologies can circulate hateful attitudes, but they also hold the possibility of combatting otherization by teaching a particular set of values.

Finding the equipment to tackle otherization is no small task. Drawing from Olga Idriss Davis, Karma Chávez explains that “the space of otherness is the space in which people, particularly those in power, are able to see themselves as other to another. For change to occur, that space must be violated in order to reveal ‘the other within the self’” (Chávez 167; Davis 77-89). Disrupting otherness often involves prompting audiences to find connections with the Other. Burke’s concept of identification, which more broadly refers to individuals identifying common interests with other people, might provide another way of thinking about this process (Burke *A Rhetoric of Motives* 20). Identification is described as necessary for socialization and collaboration among divided human beings (Burke *Attitudes Towards History* 264).

However, audiences are not always willing or ready to engage with the space of otherness. The process of creating identification within a power structure may require a certain set of conditions. From Hannah Arendt’s perspective:

We become aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one’s actions and opinions) and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerge who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation. (177)

Put another way, identification with the other may only happen during moments of widespread struggle. Arendt tells us that discrimination, especially based on

citizenship and borders, exists at all times. This right to have rights, however, becomes especially visible to everyone in the wake of massive and recognizable events of discrimination. A major political event, such as Brexit, might be the opportune situation for audiences to seek identification with disenfranchised groups. When the right to have rights becomes more apparent, individuals may be more willing to identify with the Other, especially when exposed to a form that conveys the plight of otherness.

The choice to use nonhuman equipment to inform such living, however, draws a number of novel questions about the rhetorical strategies that enable identification with marginalized groups. As J. David Cisneros argues, the discourse surrounding immigrants in the United States regularly dehumanizes them as toxic substances lacking any agency (591). Do homologous nonhuman characters drive that dehumanization further? Alternatively, could they intervene in the very process of dehumanization by expanding our definition of humanity?

Moreover, to what extent can the Burkean project account for not-quite-human equipment as a form of living? Kenneth Burke was a humanist who was worried about the societal impacts of technology, and some digital rhetoricians have gone so far as to say that Burke had an outright “disdain for technology” due to the times of warfare and genocide he lived in (Boyle and LeMieux 204). Jodie Nicotra offers another way of thinking through this, explaining that while Burke often depicted technology as a compulsion to be wary of, this compulsion and inevitability can be understood as Burkean arguments for how technology holds a persuasive force among human beings (Nicotra 128).

Previous works on rhetorical homologies rooted in Burkean philosophy have considered how fictional depictions of technology and robots influence living. Films involving technological reproduction, such as *The Ring*, can operate as a homology for how technological mass reproduction is put at odds with human uniqueness in discourse (Brummett “Rhetorical Homologies” 466). While this work addresses the portrayal of technological devices as a recurring contributor to dystopian discourses of mass production, I wish to expand on some of the ways robots are understood as appeals to humanity’s uniqueness or as deconstructing that uniqueness altogether.

Robotic characters in cinema hold a range of symbolic meanings. For example, unlike the massive hordes of evil identical machines, “the cute, benign robots of the *Star Wars* series of films are those that are most human, most authentic, with the most individuality” (Brummett “Rhetorical Homologies” 452). Similarly, in the

film *I, Robot*, “the one good robot in the bunch is the one specially created to have distinctive human characteristics” (Brummett “Rhetorical Homologies” 452). *Humans*, however, might intervene in this by disrupting the idea of what characteristics or values could even be considered human. The empathetic framing of robotic characters also diverges from earlier representations of robots in western culture as the erosion of white masculinity (Abnet 147). With these considerations in mind, we ought to investigate how decentering humans within cinematic representations of the act of living interacts with the space of otherness and creates a broader awareness of the right to have rights.

The Brexit Backdrop

Television series regularly provide equipment for living through times of difficulty and novel political situations. For instance, Paul Johnson attributes the success of *Breaking Bad* to white male anxieties during the Obama presidency (25). These connections between fictional television shows and real-world political consequences are not necessarily obvious to the audiences that watch them. Nevertheless, the invisibility of rhetorical homologies does not detract from the fact that film can be “powerfully connected to real-life experiences. For instance, [Brummett] believe[s] it can be shown that superhero films have significantly increased, at least in the United States, since the attacks of September 11, 2001” (“What Popular Films” 67).

Under this rubric, *Humans* might be read as a direct response to xenophobic and racist discourses of Brexit. The Brexit campaign was very influential in British culture during the time of the show’s release and primarily focused on immigration issues. Among their many appeals to convince citizens of the UK to leave the EU, the campaign often emphasized that the EU’s immigration policy made it difficult to impose more restrictions on immigrants coming into the country. Political pundits and social scientists alike attributed Brexit to the anti-immigrant discourse produced by Leave.EU (Johnston). Some of this discourse, in fact, was blatantly discriminatory and false. For instance, investigative journalists found Leave.EU staged fake videos of unlawful border crossing into the UK and fake photos of migrant men of color assaulting white women (Channel 4). Leave.EU, Vote Leave, and similar campaigns advocating for Brexit had a series of recurring discursive themes that stoked the flames of otherness. There were several common themes present across various forms of discourse in favor of Brexit. The following

subsections will outline three of these themes and how they were present in the third season of *Humans*.

A Sense of Loss. The first theme I would like to emphasize is the representation of a wounded nation determined to return to its former glory by taking its power back from those who supposedly stole it. Signs and advertisements (see Figures 1, 2, and 3) sported phrases about taking the country back and regaining control over the UK's borders. This loss of power creates a binary of otherization, effectively demonizing the immigrants or international organizations who are implied to have stolen the power in question.



Figure 1. (Lemire and Colvin “What do the Brexit”)



Figure 2. (Drewett “More than 2,000,000”)



Figure 3. (Safdar “Brexit”)

This sense of loss can also be found in *Humans*. The third season begins a year after “Day Zero,” or the day all the synthetics collectively became conscious. The discriminatory responses of the human society are especially prevalent in this season. Through all of this, it is important to note that all of the people of color cast

in the show play synths. More specifically, some of the most frequently featured synths in the show are played by two Black men (Ivanno Jeremiah and Sope Dirisu) and an Asian woman (Gemma Chan).

The opening scene of the third season shows viewers a montage of fictional news broadcasts over the past year displaying what has happened since the robot workers collectively awoke as conscious beings. The headlines read “MASS MALFUNCTION OF SYNTHS REPORTED” and “DO NOT APPROACH SYNTHETICS’ SAY MANUFACTURERS IN STATEMENT” (“Episode #3.1” 00:01:04-00:02:05). Various newsperson characters describe Day Zero, when the synths awoke, as “a global crash” and show images of spray-painted walls reading “SYNTH SCUM!” in red letters next to piles of deceased robots. The show situates this contemporary dystopia firmly in British culture by creating fictional broadcasts from BBC news, a real British news source (see Figure 4).

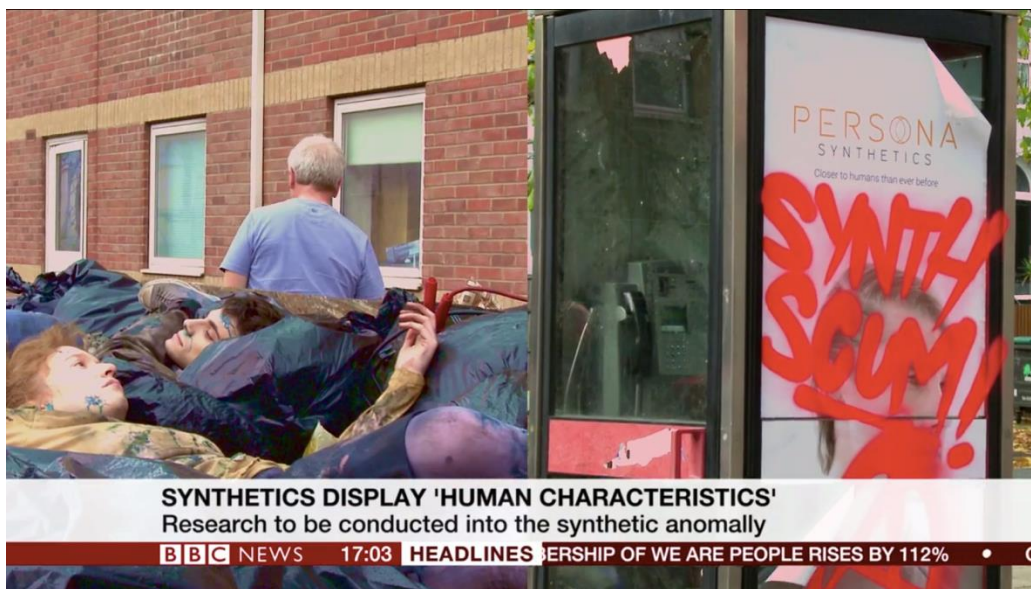


Figure 4. (*Humans* “Episode #3.1”)

The loss of a stable and homogenous society is encapsulated by the statements of an anti-synthetic movement, We Are People, that is introduced in the opening scene and plays a role throughout the third season. Claudia Nowak (Susannah Doyle), the leader of We are People, tells cameras: “It’s time to put us, human beings, first again” (“Episode #3.1” 00:01:45-00:01:49). This phrase is noticeably similar to the pro-Brexit calls to “take our country back” and even Donald Trump’s

populist campaign slogan “make America great again” and historic calls to put “America First.” We Are People is a rhetorical homology for pro-Brexit campaigns, and perhaps populist movements around the world, that demand a return to normalcy in a time of supposed loss.

The interactions synthetic characters have with human beings are also reflective of the binary of otherization implicit in this discourse. In the third episode of the season, conscious synthetic Mia ventures beyond the “designated area” for synthetics and attempts to get an apartment in a town among human beings. Once she overcomes the social and legal barriers to getting the apartment, Mia faces anti-synth cruelty every time she leaves her home. As she walks back to her apartment one day, an angry mob of humans follows Mia and shouts at her. One woman shouts at her, “go back to your own kind!,” while others spit at her (“Episode #3.3” 00:18:50-00:19:05). Here, humanoid haters are not only otherizing Mia and demanding she leaves their sight; they are also nostalgically longing to “take back” the reins of the world they knew before the synths woke up and believe removing the Other will bring their situation “back” to what they knew once before.

Economic Disempowerment. Another discursive theme is the consistent idea of economic disempowerment brought on by immigrants and the EU. Immigration became a central component of the campaign to leave the European Union, largely because social media advertisements and newspaper headlines pushed the idea that immigrants were stealing jobs from citizens of the UK (Adam and Booth). Poor and working-class Britons, in particular, were made to believe their economic woes were the byproduct of immigrants coming to the UK because of EU policies. In turn, part of what pro-Brexit campaigners were implying they wanted “back” was jobs from migrant workers (Walshe).

In the world created by *Humans*, humanoid robots have taken on jobs in the service industry, mechanics, factories, domestic labor, and other supposedly dirty low-wage jobs that are considered undesirable work for many humans. Throughout the series, but especially in season three, there is a blatant hatred for synths among working class humans before and after their conscious awakening. While the middle and upper classes come to rely on synthetics for their labor and feel betrayed by their awakening, low-wage workers who lost their jobs to synthetics are given a scapegoat for their economic woes within anti-synth discourse.

The show is laden with depictions of economically disenfranchised humans mourning the loss of their jobs to robots. In one scene, a man who appears to be homeless and asking for money has a cardboard sign reading “Synth [sic] took job.

Please help. God bless” (“Episode #3.1” 00:08:12-00:08:16). The sign, intended to garner sympathy from those who pass by, implies that losing a job to a machine is considered a tragic event that renders a human helpless and unable to escape homelessness. The synth, in this text, is the evil forcing humans to live on the streets. When synths are effectively blamed for the economic troubles of humans, they become the supposed reason why humans are no longer “first,” and humans are subsequently encouraged to take back their place at the top of the pyramid.

In the season finale, the humans violently attempt to “take back” their place at the top by attacking one of the designated areas where synths live. When Mia walks out to the angry mob of working-class humans ready to attack their compound, she begs for peace. One of the humans leading the mob shouts, “Is that what you want? I was a mechanic. I loved my job. I was good at it till’ one of you lot took it. I couldn’t keep up with my mortgage. Then, my wife left, took the kids, and you want peace? Well, I want my life back” (“Episode #3.8” 00:24:56-00:25:25). He then proceeds to attack the robots with a bat. In this monologue, the blue-collar mechanic blames the robots as a collective for his economic disempowerment and subsequently, his emasculation. He has been persuaded that robots are the root of his problems by campaigns such as We are People. Therefore, he is compelled to believe the extermination of synths will alleviate the economic problems that affect his personal life.

The Threat of Terror. Another consistent theme I identify in pro-Brexit discourse is the supposed threat of foreign violence. Campaign commercials from Vote Leave often featured white women being pushed aside by burly immigrant men (Shaw). Posters from Leave.EU compared the consequences of the referendum vote to the Orlando Shooting of 2016, implying that immigrants brought in by the European Union were Islamist extremists (see Figure 4). This conflation of immigrants with violence and outright terrorism effectively creates an atmosphere of fear around Brexit.



Figure 5. (Mason “Leave.eu Condemned”)

This theme is very prevalent across the third season of *Humans*. Day Zero, or the day when the synthetics awoke, is treated as a national day of mourning, and its phrasing sounds eerily similar to the phrase Ground Zero. Ground Zero can generally refer to a place where a large bomb erupted or, more specifically, the 9/11 memorial in New York City. Its anniversary falls both on the first and last episode of the season. On this day, the humans gather to mourn the hundreds of thousands of humans who died in accidents when the synthetics became conscious. The robots who were driving cars, handling dangerous equipment in factories, and caring for children are described as malfunctioning that day in a way that led to many deaths. The act of global mourning on this day is accompanied by intense nationalisms and love for humanity that strikes a clear resemblance to the memorialization of terror attacks in the western world, such as the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

We are People, and other entities that produce anti-synth rhetoric, often refer to Day Zero as evidence for why synths are a dangerous threat to humanity. Meanwhile, the robots wish the humans would acknowledge the thousands upon thousands of synthetic lives that were also lost on Day Zero. On a talk show, We are People leader Claudia Novak tells audiences the time to exterminate the supposedly violent threat of synths is overdue. She explains, “If a make of car developed a fault that led to the death of a hundred thousand people, do you think

we would see that car on the roads? No, we would not” (“Episode #3.1” 00:21:28-00:21:39). By describing the synths’ complicated condition of consciousness as broken and unfixable, *We are People* tells the audience it is justifiable to remove them. After all, the purpose of these machines in the first place was to be useful to humans. Once the machines become dangerous, they have no right to exist. In this view, they did not even have the right to have rights in the first place.

The lack of this right is part of why synths are confined to “designated areas” far from human society. In these gated, government-surveilled warehouses, synths die daily from a lack of access to electricity and basic supplies. They live in a decaying industrial fort designed to keep them away from human beings. A curfew is also enforced to keep synths from leaving their designated area at most times of day. These measures, in the government’s view, are intended to protect humans from being attacked by “malfunctioning” synths. The segregation of conscious robots from the rest of humanity mirrors many dark times in human history. This separation holds commonalities with concentration camps, migrant detention centers, insane asylums, Japanese internment camps, segregation in the American South, and many other historic acts of discrimination meant to cleanse a society of its impurities. The discourse surrounding the need to avoid the integration of robots into human society argues they are a menace to life as we know it and ought to be avoided.

The anti-synth discourse is also formally integrated into the education system for human children growing up during this confusing time. In one scene, a man visits an elementary school to give a lecture in a gymnasium called the “Synth Safe Program.” He shows a picture of a green-eyed synthetic and asks the students to tell him about it. A girl raises her hand to say, “they’re dangerous,” and he concurs, “Yes! The green eyes are broken. They don’t have to do anything we say.” Broken, in this sense, becomes synonymous with dangerous and capable of free will. He then asks, “So what do we do when we see a green eyes?” Without the slightest hesitation, the children chant in unison “steer clear,” and the man enthusiastically congratulates them for their correct answer (“Episode #3.1” 00:14:32-00:15:14). By instituting anti-synth pedagogy, the humans cement the idea that robots are violent and must be avoided into the minds of future generations.

Somewhat Human Implications

The rhetorical construction of personhood, on and off screen, is often reliant on homologies about human rights. While unpacking how anti-abortion and animal rights groups personify non-human subjects with rhetorical homologies, Jason Edward Black argues that “rights take on meaningful importance in the construction of personhood” (327). Being deserving of rights, in the public eye, has historically involved the construction of a human or humanlike entity. Likewise, in the *Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle*, Burke explains that denying rights to people often involves positing them as a dehumanized scapegoat for societal ills (*The Philosophy*202-03). *Humans* radically shifts these tendencies by creating a world where robots are marginalized for having a consciousness like human beings. Their proximity to humanity, the center of power, is considered threatening and potentially disempowering to human beings rather than a ground for rights. As such, a rhetorical homology involving non-humans fighting for human rights prompts the perfect discursive storm to redraw existing boundaries around Burkean equipment.

The rhetorical homology that exists between *Humans* and British anti-immigrant discourses is a form of dehumanization. The discourse of otherization bears a distinct mark that allows the very idea of humanity to serve as the Symbol for citizenship. Ultimately, the supposed threat that immigrants posed to British society was their proximity to that society. Citizenship begins to lose its power as noncitizens become a significant part of what it means to live in the United Kingdom. The equipment for living in the United Kingdom is the labor, struggle, and experiences of immigrants that ought to be seen as living. Pro-Brexit campaigns lament the loss of patriotism and endangerment of true citizens because the reconfiguration of British society threatens the centrality of citizenship. Similarly, the We are People movement in *Humans* demonizes the synthetics because conscious robots threaten the centrality of humanity by changing what characteristics could be considered exclusively human. Altogether, the fear of losing power and a certain fragility about cultural change motivates this not-quite-human homology.

Humans uses rhetorical homology in an attempt to teach inclusive values by naming the form of anti-immigrant discourse for what it is: a movement that claims “We Are People” while participating in the inhumane treatment of others. In this homology, humanoid robots are rhetorically powerful equipment *as* living because they respond to pro-Brexit xenophobia with a satisfyingly familiar form that received a not-quite-human facelift. Artwork, literature, and other forms that serve as “equipment for living” provide strategies for approaching particular situations

(Burke *The Philosophy* 304). That equipment, however, is not static, because “the processes of change of identity are most clearly revealed by analyzing formal works of art and applying the results of our analysis to the ‘informal art of living’ in general” (Burke *The Philosophy* 308). If living is an informal artwork in itself, and artwork, which is a form of equipment, is indicative of identity, then equipment is not just “for” living. Rather, equipment is entangled in living.

The not-quite-human equipment presented by *Humans* complicates that living by showing a “symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing)” (Burke *Language as Symbolic Action* 16) thing that faces the pains of otherization. This way of thinking transcends the historically connected semantic boundaries of citizenship, personhood, and humanity. The dehumanization faced by immigrants is a denial of the right to have rights that was illuminated with a very blunt representation of living without access to humanity. Living as not-quite-human equipment was the space of otherness the synthetics of *Humans* were made to endure. In Hartelius’ words, “symbolically grounded violence can be resisted with more persuasive counter-symbol use” (328). In the fictional world created by *Humans*, the ideological binary between subjects and objects is symbolic violence that forms a universal liberal subject that is supposedly more deserving of rights (Atanasoski and Vora 82-3). By using technological equipment to convey a message about the space of otherness, the impact of dehumanization is demystified to some extent. The right to have rights is exposed by shedding light on the very core of the form itself: access to subjectivity.

However, using non-human equipment to represent the plight of immigrants may also participate in dehumanizing logics. In the United Kingdom, racist ideals of biological determinism are often reinforced with metaphors that regard immigrants as nonhuman animals or objects (Charteris-Black; Mujagić and Berberović). The humanoid robots in *Humans* might be conscious, but they are still essentially different from the human beings in the show. For instance, they need to charge with a reliable power source rather than consume food and water. They also communicate with less emotional expression and have a different set of athletic capabilities. This projection of essential differences reinforces the idea that there are supposedly natural or biological divides between us and the Other. Historically, representations of robots in popular culture imagined these essential differences between robots and humans as evil. Racialized and gendered stories of broken or immoral machines were common themes among white male science fiction writers of the twentieth century (Abnet). *Humans* may reframe the narrative by portraying

the robots as moral and virtuous compared to the hateful humans. Yet it still uses a nonhuman and biologically different signifier to represent the experience of the Other. In the words of Stuart Hall, discourses of racial and ethnic differences are given cultural salience when we become “subjects of its power/knowledge” (56). By participating in the pre-existing fantasy of robots as a homology for difference, *Humans* diverges from the history of science fiction plotlines while also upholding its tendency to represent otherness as a matter of biological determinism. This polysemic tension demonstrates the symbolic limitations robots hold in stories about social change. Making the right to have rights visible through robotic rhetorical homologues has the potential to make dehumanizing logics of anti-immigration discourses more apparent, but at what cost?

Although many of the performers playing synths in the show are Black people or people of color, robot homologues like *Humans* do not necessarily center the experiences of marginalized human individuals through their terms and practices. In fact, this particular homology lacks an explicit conversation about racism and hateful discourse during Brexit. When confronting xenophobia, Chávez would tell us centering the perspectives of the non-citizen is how we might redefine our current rhetoric of citizenship (168). Rhetorical homologues are built on the desire to seek identification with others. The societal search for sameness, rather than an appreciation and understanding of the unfamiliar, presents countless challenges. In some ways, getting audiences to identify with a nonhuman character or cause through robotic rhetorical homology may chip away at the discursive power of dehumanizing rhetoric. At the same time, subaltern perspectives may be relegated to nonhuman metaphors in the process.

Humans challenged British audience members to look inward and consider their discomfort with immigrants by critiquing the demonization of those who are considered less human or less of a citizen. The rhetorical homology in *Humans* gives us equipment for living by imagining equipment *as* living. Depending on the context, imagining people as equipment can be a reductive way to envision subaltern experiences. At the same time, it can operate as a reflexive process for issues such as how we approach populist movements outside of the United Kingdom, who we believe deserves a hospital bed during COVID-19, or how we treat the kid from the wrong side of the tracks. To borrow from Burke, “when we use symbols for things, such symbols are not merely reflections of the things symbolized, or signs for them; they are to a degree a *transcending* of the things symbolized” (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 192). *Humans* is about robots, it is about

Brexit, and it is also about the ongoing situation of struggle where people are made to feel like equipment for someone else's idea of living.

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