

HUMANS

(Series 1 Episode 1, 2015)



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Section A: Television (AS); Television in the Global Age (A Level)

Focus Areas:

Media Language
Representation
Media Industries
Audiences
Media contexts

PRODUCT CONTEXT

- This product is one of the options studied for the Section A: Television option at AS and alongside an episode of *The Returned* at A Level. The set product is the first episode of Series 1 broadcast on Channel 4
- *Humans* is a science-fiction thriller that is co-produced by Channel 4, AMC Studios and Kudos, and distributed by Endemol Shine International.
- *Humans* is an Anglo-American adaptation of the Swedish programme *Real Humans*, the format of which was sold to more than 50 countries. The creator of *Real Humans* voiced his disappointment that the UK opted to remake the programme rather than broadcast the Swedish original but stated that this subtitled version may be more difficult to sell to the American market. (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/creator-swedish-sci-fi-drama-real-humans-disappointed-anglo-american-adaption-arriving-british-screens-instead-original-10255726.html>)
- It was first broadcast on Channel 4 at 9pm on 14 June 2015. It first aired on the American AMC network on 28 June 2015.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media Language

The codes and conventions of media forms and products, including the processes through which media language develops as a genre.

- In its simplest terms a genre is a type of media product, but it is more complex than that, genre provides a way for producers to communicate messages to audiences. Audiences need to be able to recognise genres and the codes and

conventions are established over time, they have expectations that need to be fulfilled and establishing the genre is key to the effective marketing of the product.

- Genre has an influence on the production and distribution of television programmes, it affects the way in which they are marketed and scheduled.
- The science fiction genre has a well-established cultural history and has a recognisable repertoire of elements. These conventions have evolved over time and developed to reflect social and cultural change and the needs and expectations of audiences. However, these programmes share similarities which place them in the science fiction genre including:
 - A **narrative** with a central quest which may focus on space exploration, aliens, time travel or the dangers of developing technology. The narrative may be set in the future or, as in the case of *Humans*, an alternative present.
 - Science fiction may use a range of different narrative structures. The programme may conform to Todorov's theory where the structure is linear from the initial disruption through to a resolution, or non-linear where time and space is manipulated through for example, flashbacks or flashforwards. In *Humans*, there are flashbacks to the synths hiding in the forest and Mia/Anita has flashbacks to a previous existence.
 - Narrative disruptions occur that change the course of the story, these can be events that happen or revelations that are made by characters. Sometimes the audience are in a privileged spectator position whereby they know more than the characters within the story world. For example, in the set episode of *Humans* the audience is aware of Leo's storyline and the fact the Mia/Anita and Niska are 'different'. This allows the audience to anticipate how the narrative may develop.
 - Binary oppositions function as a narrative element in science fiction, in *Humans* these include humans vs synths, emotional vs rational, male vs female, the individual vs

society, nature vs technology. The resolving of some of these binary oppositions within the story world may have an ideological significance, for example the discourse around artificial intelligence (AI) and the development of technology at the expense of human engagement (Structuralism: Levi-Strauss).

- Plot situations are included that are typical of the science fiction genre. For example, the battle between humans and aliens, scientific experimentation, and a quest. These situations are made more interesting in *Humans* as the narrative takes place in a recognisable, seemingly realistic, world.
- Story arcs and narrative strands occur in and across episodes of a series. In *Humans*, as the first episode of a new series, there are several complex, enigmatic narrative strands, which will be interwoven across the episodes, including:
 - Leo's quest to recover the 'conscious' synths.
 - The enigma around Laura who did not seem to be working when away and the relevance of the photograph album she hides.
 - The enigmas surrounding the character of Mia/ Anita: looking at the moon, her engagement with Sophie and the fact that she is not a typical synth and seems to have some human emotions, 'the moon is beautiful tonight'.
 - Odi's malfunction and the emotional attachment between him and Dr Millican, exploring the Frankenstein intertextuality of making a monster.
 - Pete and Jill Drummond and the relationship with the synth Simon.
- **Stock characters** usually including scientists, robots, androids, aliens, and ordinary humans. Often the pairing of characters are binary opposites, and their relationships contribute to tensions within the narrative, for example that between Mia/Anita and Laura.
- **Setting and locations.** These will become synonymous with the programme and the brand and will relate to characters and the sub-genre. Some settings will be typical of the science fiction genre, for example, the laboratory.
- **Iconography.** As well as conveying the genre, this can have a thematic significance. In *Humans* the binary oppositions between humans and synths raises questions about what it means to be human. This is evident from the start of *Humans* in the credit sequence where the iconography of robots performing tasks and the images of technology related to AI suggests they can replace

humans. This is combined with images creating scientific realism.

The processes through which meanings are established through intertextuality:

- Recognisable codes and conventions of other examples of the science fiction genre.
- Elster is a Hitchcockian reference to *Vertigo* in which Gavin Elster 'creates' the perfect woman to serve his own ends.
- *The Stepford Wives* film in which domestic, beautiful, subservient female robots replace real women and are controlled by men.
- AI: Odi is treated like a son by Dr George Millican. In his attempts to correct his malfunctioning there are links to the *Frankenstein* narrative of the doctor creating a monster that cannot be controlled.
- *Blade Runner*, the narrative of the synths becoming sentient and conscious. Niska is reminiscent of Pris the 'basic pleasure model'.
- Reference to 'Asimov blocks' in their programs which relates to the Laws of Robotics outlined by Isaac Asimov and included in *I, Robot*.
- *Humans* is a remake of the Swedish programme, *Real Humans*.

Theoretical Approach: Narratology - Todorov

- All narratives share a basic structure involving movement from one state of equilibrium to another, separated by a disequilibrium. The opening of *Humans* establishes a typical domestic narrative involving interaction between the father and children with Laura the mother away working, this is the equilibrium.
- The disruption to this equilibrium is signalled by the audio code 'Soph, shoes on, we're going shopping', the synth is purchased and disrupts the family routine.
- The recognition that the equilibrium has been disrupted is evident in Laura's disquiet about Mia/Anita and her interest in Sophie.
- As this is an example of an episodic drama there would not be a resolution at the end of the first episode, instead there is a cliffhanger as Mia/Anita walks into the night with Sophie.

How genre conventions are socially and historically relative, dynamic and can be used in a hybrid way (A Level only):

- Although genres have never been stagnant, it is increasingly the case that they are more dynamic and seek to challenge audience expectations. The genre now is a starting point to target the

audience and then surprise them through hybridity and intertextuality.

- Some programmes, for example *Humans*, challenge and subvert genre conventions, in this case through the narrative, issues raised, characters and reference to other genres. *Humans* combines the codes and conventions of science fiction with those of a soap opera. Whilst there are the typical conventions of androids, alternative realities and the iconography of science and technology, this is all set within a domestic setting featuring family relationships.
- The programme is socially relevant as it addresses concerns about advances in technology, especially AI.

Theoretical Approach: Genre – Steve Neale

- Neale asserts that genres may be dominated by repetition, but they are also marked by difference, variation and change. The science fiction genre has a recognisable repertoire of elements, but to appeal to audiences, new programmes need to display something different to set them apart from other examples. Difference is essential to sustain a genre, to simply repeat the codes and conventions of the form would not appeal to an audience. As the creator of *Real Humans* stated in an interview about the remake: ‘the scripts are “great” and [he] appreciates the fact that the new series is “similar but differs a lot as well”. “It’s not a carbon copy, which would be boring,”’ (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/creator-swedish-sci-fi-drama-real-humans-disappointed-anglo-american-adaption-arriving-british-screens-instead-original-10255726.html>)
- In *Humans*, the way the programme uses its narrative to address recent debates about the role of AI in everyday life proved novel for audiences. Its use of more limited special effects and more realistic locations sets it apart from the high budget American examples.
- *Humans* demonstrates that genres change, develop and vary as they borrow from and overlap with one another. Some contemporary science fiction programmes are less easy to categorise as they are hybrid genres and this variation consequently enhances audience appeal. *Humans* borrows conventions from other science fiction texts but also from soap operas and domestic dramas.
- Genres exist within specific economic, institutional and industrial contexts. The recognisable codes and conventions of science fiction make them easy to market to audiences. However, subverting and challenging these

conventions by introducing more novel elements as in *Humans* with the iconic branding image of Mia/Anita and their innovative marketing strategies, can also ensure commercial success.

How the combination of elements of media language influence meaning

- **Visual codes:**
 - **Codes of clothing:** The connotations of characters’ clothing and appearance create meanings. Clothing is a rapid way of communicating messages in *Humans*, particularly in defining the difference between the humans and the synths and the passive and active characters. For example, Leo’s clothing establishes him in the role of a freedom fighter and an active protagonist.
 - **Gesture and expression:** non-verbal communicators are quick ways of constructing meaning. Laura’s range of troubled expressions, evident from the beginning, rapidly convey her disquiet about the arrival of the synth and foreshadow the narrative. Mia/Anita’s maternal gestures towards Sophie create an enigma. The caring gestures Dr Millican shares with Odi establishes the bond he has with the synth.
- **Iconography and Setting:** the props, backgrounds, and settings work to construct meaning and establish the science fiction genre. The binary oppositions of the domestic setting, the scientific settings and the outdoor natural locations of the forest reflect the narrative themes and tensions.
- **Technical codes**
 - Camera shots, movement and angles work together to communicate messages and ‘show’ the narrative.
 - Close-ups advance the relationships between characters and establish tension and a dynamic. This is evident in the ‘conversations’ between Laura and Mia/Anita and Joe’s interest in the synth. Close-ups on Mia/Anita throughout the episode encourage the audience to question her perceived lack of emotional engagement. The close-ups are held longer on Mia/Anita to create the enigma around her character.
 - Framing is also important in the establishment of characters and relationships, for example in the interaction between Mia/Anita and Laura and Mattie. Here, the combination of framing, gesture and expression foreshadows the tension between these characters.
 - Establishing shots are quick ways of communicating information. The early establishing shot of the city serves to create a

- sense of cultural verisimilitude establishing a real city in which the characters function, so reinforcing their believability.
- The editing of the credit sequence combines a montage of images of computer technology, artificial intelligence and grainy archive footage to establish surface realism and reinforce genre conventions recognisable to audiences.
 - **Audio codes** - Sound and music are effective in communicating meaning in this programme.
 - **Music:** this effectively establishes characters and the genre. The choral music used in the pre-title sequence when Mia/Anita is introduced looking at the moon, creates an enigma around her sentience, this segues into the techno music of the credit sequence so establishing elements of the narrative and the genre.
 - **Diegetic sound:** the laughing of Mia/Anita at the table is jarring and reinforces the fact that she is performing human behaviours.
 - The use of silence is also very emotive and is used in the pre-credit sequence as the audience is shown the rows of synths to establish awe.
 - **Dialogue:** this serves to establish the genre and construct the characters. The technical and scientific language used is conventional of the science fiction genre. The voices of the synths and their stilted way of speaking separates them from the humans. Leo's dialogue is related to action and combat, reflecting his role in the narrative. Laura and Mattie's questioning of Mia/Anita illustrates their discomfort and uncertainty about her presence in the household. Changes in Mia/Anita's dialogue suggests that she is more emotional, for example her comment on the moon and her 'Why?' response to Mattie after she tries to shoot her.

Theoretical Approaches: Post modernism – Baudrillard (A Level only)

- Baudrillard argues that the media create hyper-realities based on a continuous process of mediation. What is encoded as 'real' and what audiences then decode as actual, is not 'real' but instead 'simulacrum', signs which reference other signs, which then creates a hyper-reality.
 - Audiences accept this constructed reality as real because they are consistently exposed to a world of images which no longer refer to reality.
 - Media images have come to seem more "real" than the reality they supposedly represent.
- Postmodern elements in *Humans*:
 - The programme is postmodern in its narrative and the manipulation of time and space. The narrative is paradoxical and fragmented, and audiences are required to suspend their disbelief.
 - There are also elements of bricolage, intertextuality and cultural codes to create audience appeal. Meaning is shaped through reference to the other science fiction texts. The programme relies on audience understanding of science fiction codes and conventions to decode meaning.
 - The synths blur the boundaries between the human and synthetic form.
 - The inclusion of the Channel 4 news report focusing on AI suggests an alternative reality.
 - The fake advertisements for Persona Synthetics and the mock store front were part of the marketing campaign for the programme merging the real and media world.
 - Applying the concept of "simulacra" to *Humans*:
 - The synths themselves may be seen as simulacra – copies of "perfect" humans which do not really exist.
 - The parallel world to our own is a hyperreality, it is constructed as a present or near-future re-presented from a mediated perspective.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

Consider how representations are constructed through a process of selection and combination.

- All representations are constructed and are not 'windows on the world'. Representations are constructed through media language, the information in the previous section will therefore be relevant when exploring representation in *Humans*. Media products are constructed through a process of mediation to communicate meanings using elements of media language including:
 - **Technical codes.** Camera shots, angles, movements and editing combine to construct representations and to position audiences in relation to those representations.
 - **Audio codes:** diegetic and non-diegetic sound including a soundtrack, mood music and dialogue contribute to the construction of representations.
 - **Iconography:** clothing, particularly in relation to the cultural context, contributes to the construction of representations and will have been a key consideration of the producers in creating the characters and their roles.

AS/A Level Media Studies - Set Product Fact Sheet

How representations may invoke discourses and ideologies and position audiences (A Level only):

- Representations carry ideological significance and reflect the time in which the product was made. There is ideological significance to the way in which representations are constructed in *Humans* which positions the audience to look at social groups and issues in different ways, reflecting cultural shifts. For example, this episode explores the growing contemporary interest in Artificial Intelligence and positions the audience to view this issue in a particular way.
- The way in which the representations are constructed in *Humans* means that audiences who have personal experience of prejudice or oppression may identify with the synths and their situation.
- The programme may invoke discourses related to the advancement of technology, contributing to the fear some may have about robot technology and AI.

The effect of social and cultural context on representations

The effect of historical context on representations (A Level only)

Representations of gender: Women/ Femininity

- There is a range of female characters in the first episode, presenting different representations of women, and they are central to the narrative. The construction of female representations creates a discourse around how women are displayed and how the audience is positioned in relation to the female characters.



- A central character is **Mia/Anita**. The audience is first introduced to her as a product to be bought, she is shown as fragmented, only her feet are seen in a delivery bag and then her shoes. She is then revealed to the family as a spectacle to be gazed at. Sophie gasps and Joe does a double take.

- Her clothing is a uniform masking any personality, it has intertextual links to the science fiction genre in its androgynous functionality. The lack of embellishment suggests utilitarian nature of her as a 'product', but also draws attention to her physical beauty.
- Her representation reflects social and cultural concerns regarding current debates around artificial intelligence.
- The dialogue establishes her further as a product to be owned: 'I am securely bonded to you as my primary user'. She is described as a 'standard domestic model'. Sophie states, 'she's ours', 'I like ours better'.
- The close-up camera shots establish her beauty and sense of otherness. Her voice is low, slow and seductive, foreshadowing what may happen with Joe. Her representation is ambiguous in that she has power but is also objectified.
- Technical codes contribute to the construction of the representation, for example when Toby first sees Mia/Anita and the audience sees her from his perspective through the male gaze.
- Mia/Anita is constructed in binary opposition to **Laura**. Mia/Anita is a 'perfect' synthetic construction and has been brought into the home to replace Laura. She is presented to Laura holding cleaning products, the representation of the perfect domestic female, in opposition to Laura who, despite her positive construction as a professional woman, appears as the frazzled, emotional working mother. Laura is constructed to appear unnerved and uncertain about the synth, shown by her code of expression and her questioning of Mia/Anita. Laura's code of clothing establishes her realism in contrast to Mia/Anita's synthetic construction.
- Mia/Anita challenges Laura's maternal role in the domestic sphere despite the fact that Laura is away from home a lot and it is in fact Joe who has assumed the domestic role. She resents the 'bond' between Mia/Anita and Sophie.
- **Niska** is also constructed as an object of the male gaze and in a much more explicit way due to her role in Episode 1 as a prostitute in a brothel and similarly to Mia/Anita is displayed as a product to be purchased. Her

clothing, gesture and the setting construct this representation and the fact that she is trapped, oppressed, and is waiting to be saved by Leo. She adopts a different form of female identity to Mia/Anita.

- **Mattie** is constructed as a stereotypical rebellious teenager who has regular confrontations with her parents. Her representation is constructed through her code of casual clothing, her truculent behaviour and expression and her bedroom with socks on the floor and posters on the walls. However, Mattie is also used to explore the issue of what happens when synths perform all of the roles previously carried out by humans. When her parents suggest she could be a doctor she replies 'By then you'll be able to turn any old synth into a brain surgeon in 7 seconds'. She reflects the fear of the power of robot technology, illustrated in her confrontation with Mia/Anita when she tries to shoot her.

Representations of gender: Men/ Masculinity

- The men in *Humans* are largely seen to be in control, it is the men who have created the synths and are in control of the technology. They have created synths that conform to sexual stereotypes, for example Anita and Simon.
 - **Joe's** representation is ambiguous. He seems to have taken on the domestic role in the household in the absence of Laura and is framed in the kitchen providing for his family and disciplining the children. However, this is a reluctant role for him, and his code of gesture suggests he is resentful of Laura, hence the purchase of the synth. Joe is impressed by Mia/Anita and drawn to her attractiveness; the audience view her through his male gaze.



- **Leo** is a protagonist and is seen as such from the start of the episode. He is active not passive and instigates action, he is often running and is a protector for Max and initially the other synths who rely on him. His clothing contributes to his representation as a survivor figure, ready to fight. He takes on the quest of finding the conscious synths. He conforms to more stereotypical male traits in that he rarely shows emotion and is cold and rational when explaining to Niska that she must stay in the brothel.

Representations of ethnicity

- Similarly to the way in which the representations of gender are constructed, the representations of ethnicity are designed to invoke a discourse around race and ethnicity.
 - The representations of ethnicity in *Humans* could be regarded as postcolonial, particularly in the scene where we see Fred and other synths picking fruit. By including these representations of racial stereotyping, *Humans* could be said to present a critique of slavery and racial hierarchies.
 - In this scene, Fred is seen to be imprisoned, oppressed and dominated by a white male. Fred states 'I am owned by...', making an intertextual reference to white plantation owners and the slaves who worked for them. He does not have his freedom, he runs, but is captured.

Theoretical Approaches: Feminist theory - bell hooks and Van Zoonen (A Level only)

bell hooks' assertion that feminism is a struggle to end sexist/patriarchal oppression and the ideology of domination can be explored in relation to *Humans*. The programme can be said to challenge and highlight patriarchal ideology through exposing and critiquing it, rather than reinforcing it:

- Men are seen to be in dominant positions in the programme and women are seen to be subservient to males; the synths have been created by a man to replace his wife initially. Laura's husband Joe replaces her with a synth as she is seen to have failed to manage work and home life, he does not discuss his decision with her.
- Mia/Anita is perfect, beautiful and is seen to fulfil the role of carer and nurturer, represented in the episode and the marketing materials in a domestic role and with the iconography of washing, cooking and cleaning equipment.

AS/A Level Media Studies - Set Product Fact Sheet

- The salesman is male, he is seen selling a woman. The men are the corporate figures who dictate and control the use of the synths. He knowingly winks at Joe when he gives him the extra 18+ information suggesting male conspiracy.
- The synths created, Niska, Anita and Simon, reinforce stereotypical ideas of gender attractiveness. Simon, the physio is an example of hypermasculinity and is seen carrying Jill.
- Niska is a clear victim of patriarchal oppression; she is on display for the gratification of men and is used by men.

Van Zoonen's assertions can be explored in relation to *Humans*:

- The idea that gender is constructed through discourse, and that its meaning varies according to cultural and historical context
- The idea that the display of women's bodies as objects to be looked at is a core element of Western patriarchal culture
 - The discourse around constructions of gender in *Humans* requires the audience to consider how culturally there has been little change in the roles of men and women which function as binary opposites. The women are associated with domesticity, nurturing and appealing to men. They are emotional and less active in the narrative. Men are active, make the decisions and are rational, reinforcing the patriarchal diegesis.
 - Men are constructed more through the intradiegetic gaze; for example, Leo is looked up to by the others with respect as a leader.
 - Mia/Anita and Niska are both objects of visual pleasure for both the audience and the male characters. They take on passive roles and are the ones being looked at as objects of the male gaze (Mulvey).

Theoretical Approaches: Gender performativity – Judith Butler (A Level only):

Butler's assertion that identity is performatively constructed by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results, can be explored in relation to *Humans*:

- Synths are not human and lack emotions but have been constructed to display particular gender characteristics through the way they act, speak and dress, a set of performative acts and rituals which illustrate the performative nature of gender.
- Mia and Niska 'perform' particular aspects of female identity which constructs them as objects and subservient to male domination.

- Leo displays typically masculine identity traits through his costume and rational, impassive behaviour.

PART 3: STARTING POINTS – Media Industries Processes of production, distribution and circulation by organisations, groups and individuals in a global context

- Channel 4 was launched on November 2nd, 1984, 18 years after BBC2. The Annan Committee set up during the Wilson government of 1970 had recommended the setting up of a fourth channel. This was authorised by the 1980 Broadcasting Act.
 - Channel 4 embraced the remit that it should cater for minorities and encourage innovation. In the early days, the channel caused controversy and was fodder for the tabloids who nicknamed it 'Channel Swore' and 'Channel Bore' and waged war on its tendency to show more sexually explicit material, to give voice to gay people and other minority groups and to discuss material regarded as too risky by other channels. This was echoed in their 2013 rebrand with the slogan 'Born Risky'.
 - Channel 4 was set up with a unique model as a publisher-broadcaster, meaning that the channel does not have any in-house production, but instead commissions content from production companies throughout the UK, or enters into co-production with other media companies. *Humans* for example, was produced for Channel 4 by Kudos. This was, in fact Channel 4's first international co-production, co-financed by the American AMC network.
 - Channel 4 fulfils its statutory public service remit comprising 15 elements, including:
 - Be innovative and distinctive
 - Stimulate public debate on contemporary issues
 - Reflect cultural diversity of the UK
 - Champion alternative points of view
 - Inspire change in people's lives
 - Nurture new and existing talent
- (www.channel4.com)



The significance of economic factors, including commercial and not-for-profit public funding to media industries and their products:

- Channel 4 is a publicly owned and commercially funded UK public service broadcaster, with a statutory remit to deliver high-quality, innovative, alternative content that challenges the status quo.
- In 1993 Channel 4 became the third largest broadcaster in Britain with an average audience share of nearly 11%. It also became the largest investor in the British Film Industry and a major investor in British Screen Finance Ltd, a company investing in new British films. It has played a key role in the revival of the UK film industry as co-producers of the Film on Four series.
- Channel 4 is in a unique position as a broadcaster as it is a self-sufficient business that reinvests all profits back into programmes, at zero cost to the taxpayer. 'A *'Robin Hood' model of cross-funding means programmes that make money pay for others that are key to delivering our remit but that are loss-making e.g., News and Current Affairs.'* (www.channel4.com).
- The channel regularly reminds its audience of its public service status through taglines used in advertising campaigns, for example 'Paid for by advertising, owned by you'.
- However, in June 2021, the government announced a consultation into the possible privatisation of Channel 4 in order to make it more able to compete with the big tech giants including Google, Amazon and Facebook, where at the time there is not a level playing field.
- Channel 4 argues that it is operating a remarkably resilient model and even during the pandemic had a surplus of £74 million. Its concern is that changing the channel's funding model will inevitably mean changing its remit to offer distinctive and diverse programming.

How media organisations maintain, through marketing, varieties of audience nationally and globally

- It is essential to use marketing to gain audience interest for a new programme. Different strategies are used designed to suit the genre, the narrative and the target audience.
- Programme makers and channels now have access to a range of digital platforms which facilitates creativity and audience reach including traditional television slots, posters, YouTube and social media platforms.
- Channel 4 created its most successful drama launch with a multi-platform campaign for *Humans* placing the audience in the seemingly

realistic world of the programme. The innovative campaign included:

- A trailer 'Meet Sally' which introduced the twist of the enigma and the hybridity of the genre, science fiction combined with a domestic family drama. The first advertisement was shown during *Gogglebox* on a Friday night and subsequently became the most searched item on Google. This developed the idea of the synths as a realistic product 'You can genuinely go out and buy a synthetic, robotic, human' (James Walker, C4 Head of Marketing).
- Creating a pseudo brand 'Persona Synths' which featured single advertisements and created a buzz around the programme and a fictional eBay auction page for the synth products.
- The campaign was further developed for Series 2 with a shop front in Regent Street where audiences could interact with and customise a synth.
- Posters featuring the face of Gemma Chan and the enigmatic taglines 'Made in Our Image', 'Out of Our Control' to create an audience buzz.
- Coverage on the front pages of listings magazines and newspapers featuring the face of Gemma Chan which became iconic of the brand and immediately recognisable to audiences.

The regulatory framework of contemporary media in the UK

The role of regulation in global production, distribution, and circulation (A Level only):

- Channel 4, similarly to other commercial broadcasters, is licensed to broadcast and is externally regulated by Ofcom, which is accountable to Parliament and publishes standards which must be adhered to by broadcasters. One of the duties of Ofcom is to examine specific complaints made by listeners about programmes broadcast on channels that it has licensed.
- Channel 4 is in a slightly different position as it does not produce its own content, it is therefore the responsibility of all programme-makers together with Channel 4's editorial staff, taking advice from the lawyers in the legal and compliance department where appropriate, to ensure that programmes comply with Ofcom's code.
- Television companies and specific channels operate self-regulation through scheduling decisions, the watershed, and announcements at

the beginning of programmes giving information about possible areas of offence. *Humans* was scheduled at 9pm, this post watershed slot indicates to viewers that the programme may contain content that is unsuitable for children, 'Unsuitable material can include everything from sexual content to violence, graphic or distressing imagery and swearing.' (www.ofcom.org.uk)

- Where versions of the programme are broadcast in different countries, there may be issues around different regulatory systems. Attitudes of other countries to offensive material including sexual content and swearing may differ and amendments may have to be made to the programme. For example, the original programme *Real Humans* included more nudity than that deemed appropriate for broadcast in the UK, this was addressed in the remake.

Theoretical Approaches (A Level only)

Regulation: Livingston and Lunt:

- Channel 4 as a public service broadcaster operates both a consumer-based regulatory model offering choice for audiences through the C4 remit which details the range of content that must be produced by the channel, including news and current affairs, and also a citizen-based model playing a role in shaping society and taking responsibility for media content through self-regulation. This ensures a diverse range of programming with an aim to offer programmes that challenge the status quo and 'represent unheard voices' (annualreport.channel4.com). For example, decisions made about the scheduling of *Humans* ensured that citizens were protected from potentially offensive material.
- The fact that television companies now operate in a global market has introduced challenges with regard to regulation of content. In addition, the ways in which television content is distributed to audiences across a range of digital platforms means that regulation is more complex.

Cultural Industries: Hesmondhalgh

- Whilst Channel 4 is a public service broadcaster, it also needs to attract advertisers and employs a range of strategies to minimise risk and maximise audiences. One of these as indicated by Hesmondhalgh, is vertical integration. *Humans* was produced by Kudos for Channel 4 and AMC Studios, broadcast by Channel 4/AMC and distributed globally by Endemol Shine International.
- The consultation on the future of the channel launched in June 2021 illustrates the issue of smaller companies having to compete against

larger ones operating across a number of cultural industries.

- It has been suggested that public service broadcasters need help in order to survive against the big tech giants, including for example having more prominence on the apps on televisions and on the programme guides. For example, More4 does not appear on the menu of many televisions.
- A key strategy used by Channel 4 is formatting their cultural products. Where audiences can anticipate what to expect from new products through, for example familiarity with genre conventions, then the risk is minimised. *Humans*, whilst containing an enigmatic narrative, also contains typical codes and conventions of the science fiction genre. The marketing materials for *Humans* incorporated formatting by playing on the audience's fear of the unknown and the power of AI associated with the science fiction genre. They also used stars including in Series 1 Colin Morgan, Will Tudor and Katherine Parkinson and William Hurt to appeal to the US market.

PART 4: Starting Points – Audiences

How media industries target audiences through the content and appeal of media products and through the ways in which they are marketed, distributed, and circulated:

- *Humans* appeals to the more niche, less mainstream Channel 4 audience who are targeted through their expectations based on the brand identity of the channel to offer something different and innovative.
- *Humans* appeals across ages and gender due to the range of characters that audiences may find attractive or relate to.
- The programme may attract an inherited audience and fan base who will be familiar with other science fiction television programmes broadcast on this and other channels, for example *Real Humans* and *The Walking Dead*.
- The stars will attract a range of audiences as they reflect diversity across age, gender and ethnicity.
- The appeal of the genre. The science fiction genre is popular and successful as it offers a range of audience pleasures. Audiences have expectations of the genre and gain pleasure in seeing expectations fulfilled (Neale). The genre offers escapism where the audience can be involved in alternative realism constructed by the programme.
- Narrative appeal. The narrative effectively highlights Neale's theory of how repetition and difference ensure the dynamic nature of genres. *Humans* incorporates the typical codes and

conventions of the science fiction genre whilst offering something different in terms of the discourse around the concerns about AI. This would appeal to fans of science fiction as well as an alternative audience who may be attracted to the surreal narrative set in an alternative but recognisable realism.

- Marketing: the marketing campaign was innovative, established the brand of the programme and created a buzz. It was the most watched drama launch for Channel 4 since figures began in 2002, with 4 million viewers. The first episode attracted 6 million viewers suggesting the success of the campaign.

Theoretical Approaches: Reception Theory – Stuart Hall

Consider Hall's assertion that there are three hypothetical positions from which messages and meanings may be decoded, in relation to *Humans*:

- An audience may understand and accept the producers intended meaning, to construct a programme that appeals to audiences by including some typical conventions of the science fiction genre, whilst offering something different in the narrative and setting in a parallel world. These audiences may also be interested in the debate about the role of Artificial Intelligence in contemporary culture. Audiences with cultural capital will be aware of how *Humans* borrows from Isaac Asimov's theory of robotics.
- Some audiences may assume a negotiated position. They may enjoy elements of the programme and the tensions created though the narrative but may be more uncomfortable with the representations and the dominant male perspective.
- Some audiences may adopt an oppositional position and may feel that the programme offers nothing new and is merely a re-working of old ideas. They may also be unhappy about representations of ethnicity that are constructed which may appear to reinforce outdated postcolonial stereotypes. A feminist audience may oppose the representation of the women in *Humans* as sexually objectified and subservient to the males and feel that there is no place for the seeming reinforcement of dated ideas and patriarchal values in a modern television drama.

Theoretical Approaches: Fandom – Henry Jenkins (A Level only)

Jenkins asserts that:

- Fans actively participate in the construction and circulation of textual meanings

- Fans are part of a participatory culture that has a vital social dimension
 - *Humans* has a range of fan sites which encourage fans to engage with each other and build the site content.
 - Fans gain pleasure from communicating with others who share their interest in the programme and as such also contribute to the marketing of the product through the dissemination of fan content.
 - Fans share opinions about the programme and through social media, offer interpretations, ratings and overviews of episodes and the series.
 - Fans interpret texts in a range of ways including through memes, fan fiction and original artwork and this can now be easily shared through social networking platforms. AMC, the American co-producer of *Humans* actively encouraged fans to upload their artwork to the official AMC Tumblr.

PART 5: STARTING POINTS – Media Contexts

Social and Cultural contexts. Consider:

- The role and remit of Channel 4 as a public service broadcaster and its cultural and social aims: 'We aim to create change in the wider world through all of our activities: from TV, to streaming, social media and film – and our day-to-day roles at Channel 4. It's the impact that Channel 4 has on society, on viewers, on British culture, on the creative industries and on the wider economy. It's why Channel 4 is – and will continue to be – different.' (www.annualreport.channel4.com)
- The channel, in the commissioning of its programmes, reflects cultural diversity and stimulates debate over contemporary issues, for example in *Humans*, the discourse around AI and the concerns regarding robots 'taking over'.
- *Humans* is set in an alternative time/place, but in its domestic reality reflects the concerns and issues of the time.

Economic contexts. Consider:

- Channel 4 is in a unique position in that it is a public service broadcaster owned by the government and funded by advertising. In 2021 the government raised concerns regarding the difficulty of the channel competing against the tech giants and is considering privatisation, this is despite the channel demonstrating its financial success in the 2021/21 report.

AS/A Level Media Studies - Set Product Fact Sheet

- This move may help the channel to compete more successfully globally.
- In the television industry, money can be made by owning intellectual property which Channel 4's publisher broadcaster model does not facilitate
- In the present system of UK broadcasting, the advertising market is fragmented with channels competing for the same advertising revenue.

Acknowledgements

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All quotes from dialogue taken from *Humans* Episode 1, Series 1. Original Broadcaster: Channel 4.