Health, Happiness and the (Post) Human

An Exploration of Biometrics, Biopolitics and the Body in Juli Zeh’s The Method (2009) and Nicola Barker’s H(a)ppy (2017)

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1 INTRODUCTION

As Michel Foucault argues in The Care of the Self, for thousands of years humans have tended to their physical, mental and emotional well-being to better understand themselves, others and the world around them. In the twenty-first century, technological advancements allow us to monitor, record and measure our bodies more thoroughly than ever before. Deborah Lupton states that self-monitoring practices involve the “quantification of various features of the human body” (42). This quantification results in the construction of the data double—the “electronic profile, compiled from personal data fragments, of an individual person [...] [which] takes on increasing social significance as

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assessments and judgements are made in various contexts based on it” (Lyon 199-200). The construction of the data double forces us to question the limits of the human body and its boundaries because, as Victoria Flanagan suggests, technology has “exerted such a profound effect on human existence and experience, new theoretical paradigms are needed to explain what it means to be human in an era where the previously sacrosanct boundaries of the humanist subject are constantly being redrawn” (29). I will be using Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson’s “surveillance assemblage” model throughout to explain how the data double is constructed by taking all the information that is known about a human, from various sources, and making an electronic profile of that human so that they can be “scrutinized and targeted for intervention” (606). This paper explores questions and the ethical issues involved in creating an idealised vision of humanity by analysing two contemporary dystopian texts, which critique self-monitoring practices, alongside the theoretical fields of critical posthumanism and surveillance studies.

The two dystopian texts that will be analysed, Juli Zeh’s *The Method* (2009) and Nicola Barker’s *H(a)ppy* (2017), both interrogate the ethical issues involved in total surveillance and self-monitoring practices.\(^1\) *The Method* portrays a futuristic society set in 2050 when pain and disease have been eradicated and every citizen is required to: submit medical data to the state, lead a meticulously healthy lifestyle and have a chip inside their arm monitoring their vital statistics. Throughout the novel, the protagonist Mia Holl frequently debates the ethics of the self-monitoring practices that are undertaken by the individual but controlled by the surveillance state. Similarly, in *H(a)ppy* the protagonist Mira A struggles to suppress her urge to question everything and live in a world where people are induced with chemicals so that their physical, mental and emotional well-being are perfectly balanced. Both novels portray female protagonists who are technological-human hybrids that question the impacts of surveillance technology and self-monitoring practices on their physical and mental health. First, I will explore the self-monitoring methods and the influences these have on the protagonists. Then, the relationship that the protagonists have with their community and their position in the society are probed through a discussion of the connections between biometrics and biopolitics. Finally, I conclude that these novels suggest that participating in self-monitoring practices can lead to

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\(^1\) The version of the literary text that I am using is translated from the original German novel entitled *Corpus Delicti* which was published in the same year. Zeh adapted this novel from her own play which is also entitled *Corpus Delicti.*
the pursuit of an idealised version of humanity which is ultimately unattainable, that prioritises certain bodies and behaviours and, most importantly, that diminishes one of the main qualities which makes us human—difference.

Dystopian fiction is the ideal genre through which to analyse surveillance and self-monitoring practices because this genre provokes questions concerning the position of the individual human being in relation to their species, other species and their environment. Peter Marks claims that “no single genre depicts and assesses surveillance with the creative vitality, social engagement and historical sweep of utopian texts” (5) and there are many reasons for this. Firstly, dystopian narratives, like surveillance theory, force us to question how identity is constructed and how the spaces we inhabit are managed and controlled (Marks 140). Secondly, as Krishan Kumar argues, dystopian texts “pick out the most distinctive and novel features of the time and [...] present them in the form of an imaginatively realised society” (22). Surveillance technologies and self-monitoring practices, that involve technology that is focused on the body, are “distinctive” (ibid) and “novel” (ibid) features of contemporary society, which is why many contemporary dystopian texts, such as Gary Shteyngart’s *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) and Dave Eggers’ *The Circle* (2013), discuss these developments and their impact on human identity. Thirdly, as Darko Suvin states, when we read science-fiction we experience “cognitive estrangement” (372) as we begin to recognise and interrogate elements of our own world, such as surveillance technology, which are exaggerated in the imagined society. Finally, dystopian literature and film are often used in surveillance theory and in critical posthumanism to illustrate an author’s point concerning the relationship between technology and the human in the real world. This is unsurprising as dystopian literature and film urge people to think critically about what it means to be human and how we are connected to each other and the world around us. Reading contemporary dystopian texts that discuss self-monitoring practices and the data double alongside critical posthumanism and surveillance theory will, therefore, shed light on the relationship between humans and surveillance technology.

Likewise, critical posthumanism illustrates the connections between everyone and everything whilst challenging ideologies which put boundaries and barriers between us. Pramod Nayar states that critical posthumanism “seeks to move beyond the traditional humanist ways of thinking about the autonomous,
self-willed individual agent in order to treat the human itself as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology” (13). Critical posthumanism states that the human is not stable or self-contained but is rather more porous than humanism states. Donna Haraway uses the metaphor of the cyborg— a “hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine” (1)—to interpret the relationship between humans and technology in the contemporary world. Whilst the use of the cyborg metaphor in this article will no doubt differ from Haraway’s views, Haraway’s cyborg manifesto and the cyborg metaphor more generally are useful starting points for surveillance scholars and posthumanist scholars to conceptualise the relationship between human and the data double. Indeed, Haggerty and Ericson briefly reference Haraway in their article and they use the cyborg metaphor very broadly to illustrate their surveillance assemblage model. Throughout this article, I use the metaphor of the cyborg alongside the fields of critical posthumanism and surveillance studies in the analysis of the literary texts to question the influence of self-monitoring practices on us as a species. In doing this, I will demonstrate that there are ethical questions regarding self-improvement rhetoric and self-monitoring practices, which need to be addressed.

2 THE SELF

Self-monitoring practices are often used in real life to monitor and improve the mind and body. In both novels, those in powerful positions use the logic of transhumanism to convince their people to strive for perfection. According to Pramod Nayar, transhumanism can be defined as “the perfectibility of the human, seeing the limitations of the human body (biology) as something that might be transcended through technology so that faster, more intelligent, less disease prone, long-living human bodies might one day exist on Earth” (16). Whilst posthumanism sees the human species as connected to other species and the environment in an interconnected web, transhumanism continues to believe that humans are separate from their environment but can be improved with technology (Nayar 6). Technology is used in the novels precisely to make the protagonists something better than human—transhuman. In The Method, the

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3 It is important to state that Haraway distances herself from the term posthumanism because the term, in her view, is too human centric and not focused enough on the co-existence and co-development of all species (261).
reader is informed that the Method system was developed so that everyone “can enjoy maximum longevity and minimum biological dysfunction” (Zeh 29) and that a healthy human must be “invulnerable to infirmity” (Zeh 1), “mentally vigorous” (ibid) and “emotionally balanced” (ibid) at all times. Citizens of the Method are subjected to strict diet and exercise regimes and are responsible for submitting medical data to the state. Likewise, in H(a)ppy citizens must also adhere to a strict diet and exercise regime and are induced with chemicals whenever they are not perfectly balanced. Whenever Mia and Mira A fail to be perfectly healthy and happy the blame is put on them and they are made to feel that it is their behaviour and lack of self-control that is causing their problems. The novels are critical of ideologies, like transhumanism and self-monitoring doctrines, which set a high standard of perfection that humans cannot attain. In fact, the first line of the Method— “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of infirmity or disease” (Zeh 1)—is from the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) constitution, as Sabine Schonfellner has noted (6). Schonfellner suggests that, in The Method, Zeh takes aim at organisations like the WHO which create an “ideal or standard by which one must live his or her life” (6) through self-monitoring practices and transhumanism. In this section, I argue that the protagonists are portrayed as human-technological hybrids, I show how they strive to be perfect through self-monitoring and self-discipline, and I suggest that this behaviour causes the protagonists’ physical, emotional and mental distress.

Barker and Zeh suggest that self-monitoring practices take away the characters’ humanness and they explore the tension between humans and technology through their descriptions of the protagonists, which use language and imagery associated with computers. As Lupton suggests, “metaphors of the body that portray it as a machine, and more specifically as a computerised information system, are frequently employed in discourses on self-tracking and the quantified self” (52). When Mia is examined by the doctor, after failing to produce her “nutritional records”, “sleep patterns”, “blood pressure readings” and “urine samples” (Zeh 11), she is described as a human-machine hybrid: “her eyes are empty and expressionless. Wires run from her wrists, back and temples. The beating of her heart, the rush of blood through her body, the electrical impulses running through her synapses are clearly audible” (Zeh 41). Mia’s lack of expression and her ‘empty’ eyes suggest that something has been taken from her through this examination, which tests Mia’s physical but not her mental or emotional state. We are also informed that the doctor “passes a sensor over Mia’s
upper arm as if he were scanning a tin of beans at the checkout” (Zeh 41). During the examination, the doctor does not ask Mia how she is feeling and there is a distinct lack of “bedside manner” to emphasise that she is dehumanised and objectified in this process. As Sarah Koellner states, “the Method’s citizens carry their own ‘personal panopticons’ through an implanted chip in the upper arm” (413) and through scanning Mia’s chip, the doctor is able to know everything that is considered to be important about Mia—her vital statistics—and nothing more. Since Mia’s physical tests show that everything is normal, her fragile mental state and emotional distress go unnoticed as emotions and feelings are not quantifiable in this world. In \textit{H(a)ppy}, emotions are quantifiable, however, and emotions need to be controlled so that those in power can detect and rectify any subversion. Mira A requests to have her “Oracular Devices readjusted” (Barker 95) and implants imbedded into her brain because her sensor shows her that she is only “h(a)ppy”. The parenthesis around the “a” alerts everyone to the fact that there is a problem with her emotional state. In both novels, the protagonists have to make adjustments to themselves in order to stay within the parameters of health and happiness that is acceptable to their societies.

Furthermore, the protagonists’ external environments are strictly monitored in order to control the protagonists’ better. For example, Mira A explains that their clothes “interact with our bodies to gauge things like size, density and temperature according to the specifics of the conditions in which we find ourselves” (Barker 19). Moreover, the chemicals that they are given “enter [them] in a multitude of ways” (Barker 2) as their environments are “sensitive” (ibid) and “cooperative” (ibid) because everything is “total, universal, all-integrated” (ibid). Likewise, in \textit{The Method} the temperature is also “maintained at a steady 19.5 degrees—the temperature at which humans think best” (Zeh 6). The external environment is carefully controlled in both novels to ensure that everyone is performing at their best like a “smart” device. Mira A notes that their food is “carefully prepared in laboratories where levels of power and water and waste etc. are all minutely controlled” (Barker 20). Whenever Mira A talks about food and exercise she mentions “power” and “energy” generated indicating that their performance is what is important. Likewise, Mia states that two of the statistics that are monitored are “energy expenditure [and] metabolic rate” (Zeh 11). It is clear from the descriptions of the protagonists and their relationship with their environment that the key factor is their performance as everything is monitored and adjusted so that they are functioning at a high standard. The language that is used to describe them is similar to the language used to describe
machines—their lifespan, speed and operation—and this suggests that the protagonists are dehumanised by the surveillance and self-monitoring practices. Moreover, it is significant that both protagonists are female as ecofeminism illustrates that the domination of technology over nature is linked to patriarchal oppression. Irene Sanz Alonso states that ecofeminism suggests that we as a species are not taking vital steps towards combating climate change because we are too disconnected from our environment (216). Alonso further suggests that, “the patterns of domination to which humans have subjected the environment run in parallel with those suffered by human and nonhuman creatures labelled the other” (261). It is because of this that Alonso argues that “patriarchy and the domination of nature [...] are deeply intertwined” (217) as men are associated with culture and reason whilst women are associated with nature and emotion (217). When read in light of ecofeminism, the novels clearly show that the control of nature and the control of the protagonists through surveillance practices are directly linked to technological domination and patriarchal oppression.

The novels further imply that self-discipline and repression are connected to self-monitoring practices because the protagonists work on improving themselves every day and internalise the idea that any problem they have with their physical, mental or emotional well-being is their fault. In The Method, the state argues that “health must be maintained and enhanced on a daily basis” (Zeh 1) because “soul training” (Koellner 412) is achieved through the “repression and discipline of the natural body” (ibid). Also, in H(a)ppy, Mira A notes that everyone “work(s) hard—but never too hard—to stay In Balance” (Barker 2). Lupton states that “one important element of self-tracking practices in relation to embodiment is how we control and manage our bodies” and that the goal of these practices is that “in the pursuit of self-knowledge and self-improvement, the mind is able to exert control over the body” (40). This ideology of the “normalisation of the deviant body” (Smith-Prei 121) through self-discipline is, as Carrie Smith-Prei argues, “morally charged” (ibid) because it places the blame onto the individual and their lack of self-control. This is why Mia and Mira adapt their behaviour when they are distressed because they believe it is up to them to take control of their thoughts and emotions. Mia exercises on her “stationary bike [which] has accumulated a backlog of six hundred kilometres” (Zeh 70), buys healthy food and intends to clean her apartment (Zeh 71) when the state reprimand her for failing to comply with the self-monitoring practices. Similarly, Mira A makes a conscious effort to keep herself in balance and she “runs for fifteen minutes on her PowerSpot” (Barker 226) every day, “applies [this energy] to altruistic causes”
(ibid), she “eat(s) sensibly” (ibid) and “sleeps peacefully at night” (ibid). Despite their efforts, both protagonists experience difficulties in maintaining this behaviour. Mira A states that she is “doing everything right, everything, everything right, but everything is somehow wrong. Because of the flaw” (Barker 195) and Mia tries to tidy up and complete her tests but fails (Zeh 39). As Paul Verhaeghe and Eline Trenson state, “the contemporary myth tells us that if we buy the right stuff, do the right exercises, and work hard enough, we will have perfect enjoyment [...] [and] if that is not the case, the sole explanations are that you did not put enough effort in it or made the wrong choices” (159). This illustrates how self-monitoring practices are connected to neoliberal capitalist ideals, which place the onus on the individual to change their behaviour so that they are happy and healthy. Again, it is significant that the “deviant bodies” (ibid) who are not able to self-discipline, rationalise and control their emotions are female as technological domination and patriarchal oppression are intertwined. In the pursuit of perfection, the protagonists discipline themselves and try to adhere to the rules of their society, which results in them blaming and punishing themselves for not meeting the high expectations put upon them.

Barker and Zeh further explore the tension between the physical body and the data double through the protagonists’ mental breakdowns. These breakdowns are caused by the protagonists repressing their thoughts and this results in them believing that there are two of them that are in conflict with each other. In *The Method*, Mia has insomnia and describes feeling trapped by the surveillance systems: she feels “stuck in her skin” (Zeh 47), imagines playing the radio loud to drown out her screaming and then imagines breaking the window and clenching glass between her fingers as she “lies there, sleepless in the posture of someone sleeping” (Zeh 47-48). She also develops a split personality as she starts talking to herself and has debates out loud with the “ideal inamorata” (Zeh 18), a woman who she believes is the spirit of her brother’s deceased lover and who no-one else can see. The ideal inamorata appears to Mia after her brother has committed suicide because he was wrongfully convicted of raping and murdering his girlfriend using DNA evidence, which is supposed to be one hundred percent accurate according to the state in the novel. This traumatic event leaves Mia questioning the Method because she can see that a society which is totally reliant on technology is flawed. In *H(a)ppy*, Mira A also has difficulty sleeping as she talks in her sleep and sleepwalks. Mira A becomes aware of her nocturnal activities from watching recordings of herself from the night before:
‘Is there still an oscillation?’ she mutters, tossing her head from side to side (as if plagued by some dreadful attack of fever) [...] she is crying. She is wailing. Her arms are slicing and coping the air with a phenomenal speed and savagery. Each limb seems quite independent—utterly disconnected—from its counterpart. (Barker 146-147)

The oscillation that Mira A refers to in her sleep is the parenthesis surrounding the “a” in the word “happy”. Mira A describes herself in the third-person as she watches the video and is detached from her embodied self because she does not recognise or remember her behaviour. In her sleep, Mira A thought that Mira B —another version of herself that she imagined—was watching over her and that she lifted Mira A’s hand “from where it has been firmly placed over Mira A’s mouth” (Barker 140) but she can see on the video that there is no-one standing above her and it is her own arms that are moving. The image of Mira B removing Mira A’s hand from Mira A’s mouth is clearly a metaphor for Mira A voicing her repressed thoughts whilst sleeping. Mira A states that “there are two of us, we are two: desire and restraint—we are double [...] there are two of us, the second and the first, A and B” (Barker 196). Just like Mia, Mira A imagines that there is another person who is a physical manifestation of the repressed version of herself. This doubling can be interpreted as a metaphor for the conflict between the human—Mira A and Mia—and the data double—Mira B and the ideal inamorata, as well as the conflict between the human and technology more broadly.

This internal conflict that Mira A endures is further shown through the breakdown of language and communication in H(a)ppy. Throughout the novel, Mira A tries to tell her story and frequently breaks off from the narrative to provide seemingly irrelevant information from the “Information Stream” (Barker 1). There are pages in the novel of just one word or a phrase which is repeated over and over, such as the word “claiming” on page 271. Certain words and phrases, which make Mira A feel an “excess of emotion” (Barker 14), are in different colours, fonts and sizes and there are also shapes and graphs on pages. For example, page 241 is made up entirely of various mathematical symbols, diagrams and charts. This makes the novel difficult to follow and it also shows that Mira A struggles to express her thoughts and understand all the information she receives from the information stream, suggesting that Mira A’s dependence on technology and her need to repress her questioning of the society diminishes her ability to communicate, debate and tell a story. This heavily implies that
storytelling is an important human quality which is being destroyed through our relationship with technology.

In this section, I argued that self-monitoring practices are inevitably linked to self-improvement techniques and also to self-discipline. The novels suggest that the pursuit of an idealised version of humanity can lead to repression as well as emotional and mental distress because the protagonists blame themselves for not being able to achieve this perfection. This high standard is ultimately unattainable because, as Lupton states, “the human computer, in its inevitable fleshy humanness, can never achieve the capabilities offered by real digitised technologies” (69). In the next section, I will focus on the relationship between self-monitoring practices, biometrics and biopolitics by suggesting that self-monitoring discourses are promoted in order to control entire populations.

3 THE COMMUNITY

Self-monitoring practices are aimed at the individual but are tied to society as a whole. In both novels, the protagonists are conditioned to believe that they need to comply with the self-monitoring methods and ensure that they become the best version of themselves that they can for the good of their society. In the *The Method*, health is defined as “the optimisation of the individual for the optimal social good” (Zeh 1). Likewise, Mira A states that “we cannot be self-serving. We cannot be individual. We are one consciousness [...] our survival is dependent on our unity” (Barker 22). By convincing people that they are letting others down by not performing at their best, those in positions of power are able to manipulate their citizens into complying with the self-monitoring practices. This also leads to lateral surveillance in the novels, which is “not the top-down monitoring of employed by employers, or citizens by the State [which is vertical surveillance], but rather the peer-to-peer surveillance of spouses, friends and relatives” (Andrejevic, 481). In the novels, the protagonists are monitored by their peers for the welfare of everyone. In this section, I will suggest that there is a link between self-monitoring technologies, which are biometric technologies, and biopolitics.

According to Foucault (1998), “biopolitics” (140) connects the “body as machine” (139) and the “species body” (139). The body as machine can be interpreted as the individual body and its “disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and
its docility [and] its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls” (139) which was discussed in part one. The species body concerns everything related to the collective body of society such as “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity” (139). In the novels, self-monitoring practices are aimed at the individual, the body as machine, but the individual is made aware that their actions will impact the collective body of society, the species body. As Joseph Pugliese states “biometrics, as a technology of authentication and verification, achieves its signifying status only by being situated within relations of power and disciplinary techniques [...] as such, biometrics is a technology firmly enmeshed within relations of biopower” (1). The protagonists are manipulated into self-monitoring through a combination of vertical surveillance, the top-down monitoring of the state, and lateral surveillance through the influence of their peers. Therefore, as Pugliese notes, the self-monitoring practices are “situated within relations of power” (ibid) that involve several layers of surveillance as well as self-discipline, which were discussed in part one.

In both novels, the protagonists are discouraged from having individuality and are conditioned to believe that individuality will lead to the collapse of their society. After asking for some privacy to grieve, Mia is informed by the judge that “oneness of purpose is the foundation of our system: there can be no room for personal matters when the general good and individual interests are connected in this way” (Zeh 50) and she is made to feel selfish for asking for privacy, a right which no one else has in this society. Mia is also accused of being a leader of the “People’s Right to Illness” (Zeh 74) group which is a collective that rebels against self-monitoring practices that are imposed on society by the state. A journalist and staunch supporter of the Method, Heinrich Kramer argues that this group “are characterised by a reactionary belief in individual freedom” (Zeh 75) which goes against the ideology of the Method. Similarly, in H(a)ppy Mira A states that “we abhor ‘personality’. We eschew difference. And The Sensor—because we ask it to, because it needs to—actively refuses to acknowledge (and thereby credit) prominent individuals—‘famous individuals”—from the Cruel Rock of History” (Barker 8). Mira A speaks in the third person throughout most of the novel as she cannot distinguish herself from everyone else however when she is disconnected from the system due to displaying an excess of emotion, she changes tense to the first person and states: “I am alone. Disconnected. From The System. From myself” (Barker 153). Although Mira A begins to take ownership of her story by changing from third person narration to first person narration, she
still feels that she can only identify as human when she is connected to everyone else because there is no individual only the community. The societies in both novels therefore prioritise the species body over the individual and encourage self-monitoring practices in order to control the entire population because, as Lupton states, self-monitoring “combines the ethos of the care of the self (or of governing the self) with that of the ideal citizen (governing over populations). Individuals can be regarded as fulfilling their obligations as citizens if they devote attention to optimising their own lives” (Lupton 39) and can be regarded as hindering the common good by not complying.

Mia and Mira A are also manipulated into complying with the surveillance systems through vertical and lateral surveillance methods, which encourage them to self-discipline so as to not let their peers down. Mia lives in a monitored house with three other women Driss, Lizzie and Pollie. It is explained that “certain households, selected for their reliability, have the privilege of carrying out prophylactic measures otherwise performed by the hygiene board” (Zeh 15). Residents of these households are “entitled to cut-price water and power” (Zeh 15). When Mia is reprimanded for smoking a cigarette, a banned substance, the household received a letter that states: “A resident of your block has been convicted for breaching the Health Code. Infractions of this nature may prejudice your status as a monitored household” (Zeh 120). Rather than just punishing Mia, the whole household is issued a warning so that the other residents will implore Mia to change her behaviour because it is having a negative impact on them, which they do. Likewise, in H(a)ppy Mira A’s actions impact her peers. Mira A explains that everyone is tied to “The Graph […] [which] shows us how In Balance we are: as a person (our physical and mental health), as a small community (a community of skills, a community of friends, a community of consumers, a community of thought) and as a broader society—as a race, as a planet, as a galaxy. Many graphs, one Graph” (Barker 3). Mira A’s thoughts and behaviour cause her Sensor to be “temporarily disabled” (Barker 72) and her Graph is “purpled” (ibid) and “flashing” (ibid). As this happens Mira A notices “a series of people on my Information Stream—alerted to this situation, this sudden crisis on The Graph” (ibid). She goes on to anxiously worry about her impact on others: “I see other Graphs purpling in an awful flood of emotion. I see other people’s anger washing through The Stream. A dreadful bruise. And I am at the core of it. I am its origin, its heart, its locus” (Barker 73). The Graph allows Mira A to see the damage that she is causing to the entire system through her excess of emotion, which causes her distress. Like Mia, Mira A is criticised by
her peers for her behaviour. A peer of Mira A’s, Powys, is distressed because he shares two group activities with Mira A and he tells her: “If both of these Communities become implicated in your purpling it will critically affect the Balance in at least two of my activities. Two of my graphs—my Communities—at the very least will be implicated. So calm down. Please” (Barker 90). Both Mia and Mira A are made aware that their actions affect their peers and the societal body as a whole so they are warned by their peers to behave for the good of their society. Through a combination of vertical and lateral surveillance methods, the protagonists are manipulated into participating in self-surveillance practices to improve themselves for the health and happiness of the entire population as self-monitoring practices are tied to both the body as machine and the species body.

## 4 CONCLUSION

From reading the novels through the lenses of critical posthumanism and surveillance studies and through using the metaphor of the cyborg, this article has demonstrated that contemporary self-monitoring practices and transhumanism need to be questioned. In fact, I believe that these novels, and literature more broadly, repeatedly show that the most important thing we can do as a species is to never stop questioning, to be suspicious of ideologies that claim to know everything and to caution against relying on technology for all the answers. As Jeanne Gaakeer claims, “the fact that we are built from living cells as much as from data and not only equipped with a body but also with a mind, favours a reading of [...] [The Method] as a call to arms to resist an instrumental use of humans before it’s too late” (150). Ideologies that prioritise our physicality and rely on quantification simultaneously discount the individual experience and interpretation, which is dangerous. As the novels show, taking away the right to freedom of thought and expression takes away our humanity. In their article published after The Method, Ilija Trojanow and Zeh ask the stark question: “do you want to wait until a chip, which has a sixteen digit personal identification number and which can be tracked by satellite, is planted into the tissue of your child’s neck at birth?” (Trojanow et al. 282). I suspect that the authors had Zeh’s novel in mind when asking this question in their article, which implores its readers not to accept surveillance methods without question and to think critically about what it means to be human. Throughout the narratives, Barker
and Zeh impress upon the reader the importance of questioning what it means to be human today and how technology impacts upon us, by exaggerating real-life self-monitoring practices and portraying a nightmarish vision of an entire species enslaved by the technology they have created, in the hope that we listen to these warnings and these dystopian visions never come to fruition.

WORKS CITED


