

Special Thematic Block

Human Boundaries / Boundaries of the Human

Introduction

Andrea Timár

“Human Boundaries/Boundaries of the Human” asks what it means to be the human, through the investigation of various human–non-human boundaries. The historically changing descriptions of the human, and the decisions regarding “who is in, and who is out” have always had social, political, and ethical consequences. This block examines artistic challenges posed to the human–non-human divides, with a special focus on the political, social, and ethical stakes involved in the always performative, and always unstable distinctions between animals and humans, machines and humans, and cadavers and the living.

Anna Kérchy’s essay explores the provocative and transgressive ways of how body art performances experiment with the human body, which in turn becomes an instrument, a medium, an agent, and an end product of artistic creation. After a brief overview of the evolution of body art from its roots in avant-garde performance arts, she arrives at the description of current trends of carnal art to shed light on the changing cultural-historical interpretations of human personifications. She describes body art’s growing dissatisfaction with anthropocentrism, and its move toward a humanimal poetics and politics that stages interspecies relationalities. In a posthumanist framework, helped by the works of thinkers such as Richard Shusterman, Peter Singer, Jacques Derrida, and Cary Wolfe, she examines the political and ethical stakes raised by art performances engaged with a variety of forms the relationship between animals and humans can take. These works include Joseph Beuys’s avant-garde performance piece *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965), Marina

Abramović's *Confession* (2010), Rosemarie Trockel and Carsten Höller's *A House for Pigs and People* (*Ein Haus für Schweine und Menschen*, 1997), Eleanor Morgan's "Serenading Spiders" (2013), Jacqueline Traide's self-exhibition as an animated mannequin in a shop window, and various other works by artists such as Damien Hirst, Marion Laval-Jeantet, Pierre Huyghe, Carolee Schneeman, or Eduardo Kac.

Dániel Panka's essay offers an analysis of the "Mission Street Station Scene" in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). This scene has so far escaped critical interest, even though it challenges the consensus about Dick's classic story. Panka uses Maria Kronfeldner's understanding of human nature as a conceptual blank mould to argue that the way the androids are treated in Dick's novel paradoxically mirrors the dehumanizing strategies humans employ against each other. Provocatively, Panka notes that the oppression of the androids and their rebellion can be compared to the American Black Power Movement in the 1960s. In the novel, androids are expelled from the venues of ethics and politics on the basis of their lack of "empathy," which is posited as *the* human essence. The Mission Scene, however, is a primary site for Deckard to witness the collapse of the human–android divide: the way the station operates emphasizes the lack of dialogue between communities due to the oppression built into the classification itself. The Voigt-Kampff test and the stubborn prioritization of "human empathy" are thus exposed for what they are: unreliable systems of classification that facilitate the oppression of androids.

József Pap investigates the sequence of Seamus Heaney's "Bog Poems," and the changing ways in which they engage with the bog bodies of Iron Age Europe. In his four collections (*Wintering Out*, 1972; *North*, 1975; *The Spirit Level*, 1996; and *District and Circle*), Heaney not only makes a connection between the violent deaths of the prehistoric past and the political troubles of Northern Ireland in the 1970s, but also ponders questions of kinship and sympathy toward past and present inhabitants of Ireland. According to Pap,

Heaney's inquiry raises the crucial questions as to what extent identity is inherited through homeland and history, and what rights and responsibilities come with it. Pap shows, through the analysis of various poems from the bog-sequence, how the technique which Heaney uses to describe the land, re-imagines the bog-bodies as living beings and how this lyric analysis turns to land, matter, and body as mediators of a common kind.

Uncorrected proof