



Androids in the Enlightenment: Mechanics, Artisans, and Cultures of the Self

Adelheid Voskuhl

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The eighteenth century saw the creation of a number of remarkable mechanical androids: at least ten prominent automata were built between 1735 and 1810 by clockmakers, court mechanics, and other artisans from France, Switzerland, Austria, and the German lands. Designed to perform sophisticated activities such as writing, drawing, or music making, these “Enlightenment automata” have attracted continuous critical attention from the time they were made to the present, often as harbingers of the modern industrial age, an era during which human bodies and souls supposedly became mechanized.

In *Androids in the Enlightenment*, Adelheid Voskuhl investigates two such automata—both depicting piano-playing women. These automata not only play music, but also move their heads, eyes, and torsos to mimic a sentimental body technique of the eighteenth century: musicians were expected to generate sentiments in themselves while playing, then communicate them to the audience through bodily motions. Voskuhl argues, contrary to much of the subsequent scholarly conversation, that these automata were unique masterpieces that illustrated the sentimental culture of a civil society rather than expressions of anxiety about the mechanization of humans by industrial technology. She demonstrates that only in a later age of industrial factory production did mechanical androids instill the fear that modern selves and societies had become indistinguishable from machines.

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