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Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination

Minsoo Kang

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From the dawn of European civilization to the twentieth century, the automaton?better known today as the robot?has captured the Western imagination and provided a vital lens into the nature of humanity.

Historian **Minsoo Kang** argues that to properly understand the human-as-machine and the human-as-fundamentally-different-from-machine, we must trace the origins of these ideas and examine how they were transformed by intellectual, cultural, and artistic appearances of the automaton throughout the history of the West. Kang tracks the first appearance of the automaton in ancient myths through the medieval and Renaissance periods, marks the proliferation of the automaton as a central intellectual concept in the Scientific Revolution and the subsequent backlash during the Enlightenment, and details appearances in Romantic literature and the introduction of the living machine in the Industrial Age. He concludes with a reflection on the destructive confrontation between humanity and machinery in the modern era and the reverberations of the humanity-machinery theme today.

Sublime Dreams of Living Machines is an ambitious historical exploration and, at heart, an attempt to fully elucidate the rich and varied ways we have utilized our most uncanny creations to explore essential questions about ourselves.

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