



Copying Machines: Taking Notes for the Automaton

Catherine Liu

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Literary Theory/Cultural Studies

Explores literary theory's fear of and fascination with the mechanical.

Anxieties about fixing the absolute difference between the human being and the mechanical replica of the human being, the automaton, are as old as the first appearance of the machine itself. Exploring these anxieties and the efforts they prompted, this book opens a window on one of the most significant, if subtle, ideological battles waged on behalf of the human against the machine since the Enlightenment—one that continues in the wake of technological and conceptual progress today.

A sustained examination of the automaton as early modern machine and as a curious ancestor of the twentieth-century robot, *Copying Machines* offers extended readings of mechanistic images in the eighteenth century through the prism of twentieth-century commentary. In readings of texts by Lafayette, Molière, Laclos, and La Bruyère—and in a chapter on the eighteenth-century inventor of automatons, Jacques Vaucanson—Catherine Liu provides a fascinating account of ways in which figures of the automaton and of the preindustrial machine haunt the imagination of ancien régime France and structure key moments of the canonical literature and criticism of the period.

Catherine Liu is assistant professor in the Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature and in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Minnesota.

Translation Inquiries: University of Minnesota Press

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