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University of Missouri-St. Louis

From the Selected Works of Minsoo Kang

March, 2015

**Androids in the Enlightenment: Mechanics,
Artisans, and Cultures of the Self . By Adelheid
Voskuhl.**

Minsoo Kang, *University of Missouri-St. Louis*



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of appeal. All were carefully considered strategic choices. And while classic defense pleas used arguments focused on the accused individual and the facts of the case and sought extenuating circumstances, a right to defense offered other possible strategies. In common-law cases in particular, renouncing a formal defense served many of the accused as a way to manifest their submission to the court and thus to hope for a more clement sentence. This new form of judicial procedure founded on the judges' powers of negotiation was similar to plea bargaining, which appeared in England and the United States in the nineteenth century, and it explains the relative rarity of recourse to oral argument for the defense.

This fine work shows how greatly the sudden emergence of a contradictory discourse can transform the nature of an inquisitorial justice founded on the arbitrary power of judges. Beyond that, it shines new light on the juridical modernity of the Republic of Geneva in the eighteenth century.

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

By *Adelheid Voskuhl*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Pp. xiv+279. \$45.00 (cloth); \$7.00 to \$36.00 (e-book).

Among the numerous recent scholarly publications on the history of automata, Adelheid Voskuhl makes a significant contribution through her detailed study of two specific automata of the late eighteenth century, both of female figures playing musical instruments. They are the harpsichord player constructed by the Swiss father-and-son team of Pierre and Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz that was first shown to the public in 1774, and the dulcimer player by the German furniture maker David Roentgen and the clock maker Peter Kinzing presented to Marie Antoinette in 1785. Voskuhl justifies her focus on them based on three exceptional characteristics—first, that among the ten or so automata that were made from 1730 and 1810 the two are the only ones that represent female figures; second, they play keyboard instruments; and third, they bear the closest resemblance to each other even though they were made by different people. On the first point, Charles Babbage did leave an account of a “silver lady” automaton that was made by the Belgian mechanic John Joseph Merlin (1735–1803), but it is no longer extant and shared no characteristics with the music-playing figures other than its gendered representation.

The second and third chapters of the book present complete and often revelatory histories of the constructions of the two automata, including the role of Calvinism and Pietism in the respective contexts of Switzerland and the Rhineland in the development of the mechanical and artisanal industries in the two locales that shed significant insight into the nature of the clock-making enterprise of the Jaquet-Droz family and the furniture-making one of the Roentgens. Voskuhl also utilizes scholarship on the transition between the pre-modern artisanal practice to the industrial that has complicated the simplistic narrative of the rapid and complete replacement of the former by the latter. In the overlap period of the late eighteenth century that has been referred to as the “proto-industrial,” the mixed use of both traditional and modern methods of production played an important role in the

* Translated for *The Journal of Modern History* by Lydia G. Cochrane.

flourishing of businesses like those of the Jacquet-Droz and the Roentgen. Both chapters also provide detailed descriptions of the two automata's receptions, through written accounts by witnesses. In those sections, Voskuhl makes an important point that questions the often repeated claim that eighteenth-century automata were regarded as symbolic objects that illustrated intellectual ideas of the mechanistic variety, most importantly of mechanistic physiology. Although Voskuhl makes too sweeping a claim in denying such a role to all eighteenth-century automata, as there is significant evidence of it in the case of the Vaucanson automata of the 1730s, as analyzed by Jessica Riskin, Joan Landes, and others, she points out that not a single commentator on either of the female automata links them to metaphysical or medical ideas that are commonly associated with Enlightenment thought. The cultural and intellectual scene of Western Europe underwent a significant change in the middle of the century, the mechanistic ideas of the previous era challenged by vitalistic thought and the culture of sentimentality. It makes sense, then, that the automata that were displayed in 1774 and 1785 would not evoke such *passé* ideas as the world machine and the iatromechanistic body in the minds of contemporary viewers. It is, in fact, in the analysis of the female automata in the context of the culture of sentimentality that Voskuhl provides the most original and profound insights in the book.

The fourth chapter begins with a detailed description of the actual mechanics of the movements of the automata, highlighting the essential point that the two figures did not merely play the miniature instruments before them, which could have been realized through the mechanics in just the fingers and arms, but they also moved their entire bodies in mimicry of human players. Voskuhl points to contemporary works on musical performance, by Johann Joachim Quantz and C. P. E. Bach, that provide instructions on proper movements that demonstrate full emotional engagement with the music. So the automata are firmly placed in the culture of sentimentality, through their embodiment of the musical ideas and practices of the time, but they also expose a baffling contradiction within that culture. "Sentimental social behavior thought itself unconventional and novel," but the writings of Quantz and Bach as well as the female automata seem to indicate that such sentimental behavior could be replicated mechanically, by humans following the rules of proper affect as well as by the well-made automata designed to move as if they are in the throes of passionate engagement with the music they are playing.

The fourth chapter provides an equally important insight into the gender aspect of the female automata, in the contexts of the expanding opportunity for women to engage in musical performance in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the role of music playing in discussions on the characteristics of the woman who is the ideal companion for a man, and the consequent proliferation of artistic images of women performing music. Voskuhl convincingly places the female automata playing the harpsichord and the dulcimer in that cultural framework that sheds light on the period's ideology of gender. The fifth chapter looks at the satirical and fantastic stories of the German romantic writers Jean Paul (Johann Paul Friedrich Richter) and E. T. A. Hoffmann in which the music-playing female automata make appearances. In connection to the central point of chapter 3 on the contradiction within the culture of sentimentality on the issue of the mechanical performance of affect, Voskuhl shows that Jean Paul and Hoffmann's works depict that very contradiction through the unstable, open-ended, and ambiguous representations of the breakdown of the boundary between the artificial and the natural. The analysis aptly criticizes mainstream interpretations of the works in terms of the romantic reaction against the industrial age, when they actually point to disparate social and cultural concerns. The fifth chapter extends that critique to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, showing how the automaton motif of the Enlightenment was repeatedly distorted

by modern writers who saw it both as a harbinger of the industrial age and as a symbolic object with which concerns about the onset of modernity was expressed.

Androids in the Enlightenment is a brilliant work of microhistory that provides thick descriptions of the two objects of its study in the social, technological, and economic contexts of their production and performance. The book also offers profound and original insights into the use of the automaton idea in the Enlightenment period and beyond, making it an important addition to the burgeoning scholarship on the history of the life-imitating machine.

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German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States, 1776–1945.

By *Jens-Uwe Guettel*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. x+281. \$90.00.

Magic Lantern Empire: Colonialism and Society in Germany. By *John Phillip Short*.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012. Pp. xii+232. \$39.95.

The history of German colonialism has received considerable attention over the last decade, perhaps more than it deserves. While the period of official colonialism was short, and the German state's colonial territories were relatively modest, Germans' interactions with the wider world and the roles they played in other states' colonies and empires were considerable. While both John Phillip Short and Jens-Uwe Guettel place their studies within those broader global contexts, they do not seek to engage them. Rather they purport to take new approaches to older problems: the question of social imperialism and the degree to which the general public was drawn into Imperial Germany's official rhetoric about colonialism and empire; and the extent to which there was a connection between the United States' federal Indian policy, the wholesale slaughter of indigenous people in German South West Africa, and the mass death unleashed by the Nazis during World War II.

Just as many forms of nationalism animated political discourse in Imperial Germany, Short shows that there were many forms of participation in colonialism. Indeed, if a general discourse of colonialism made its way across the social classes by the end of the nineteenth century, the self-appointed spokesmen for official colonialism did not control it. Their efforts were too weak to be effective, and the alternative positions were too many. Moreover, the political opposition had no more control over the reception of official discourse (or more general ideas about colonialism) among the lower classes than did the upper-class advocates. Consequently, when the leadership of the SPD dropped its direct assault on colonialism after the so-called Hottentot elections in 1907, the working classes did not follow that rhetorical shift. They retained their own diverse attitudes about the wider world and colonialism's place in it.

This welcome addition to our general understanding of colonial discourses in Imperial Germany is based on Short's careful research in municipal archives in places such as Augsburg, Leipzig, and Nurnberg. These are not the usual sites for such investigations, and that is one of the great virtues of his book: by taking us into colonial libraries in these cities, by introducing us to a range of popularizers who actively promoted German interactions with the colonial world across Imperial Germany, and by identifying letters from