First Presentation

For your first oral presentation, I am asking you to give a three-minute imagined description of a real (or, at least, purportedly real) historical automaton/robot/artificial person from the point of view of someone seeing it in action for the first time. “Historical” means “before the twentieth century.” You should draw upon the descriptions given in other sources for facts, but your description must be in your own words. Imagine yourself as an observer objectively reporting what you have experienced at a demonstration of one of these devices — the circumstances of the observation are unimportant and should not form any part of your talk. Your goal is to convey as accurately and concisely as possible what the device did, how it looked, sounded, etc., and not your personal feelings about it. For instance, it is acceptable to describe the piercing gaze of some android, but not to describe your feelings of uneasiness about it.

Imagine you are presenting this in front of an audience of intelligent adults at, say, a formal meeting of some sort of philosophical or amateur scientist society. (Again, such details should not form a part of your talk, this is just to give you a sense of the tone you should adopt.)

By “description” I mean not just visual details, but sounds, smells, and other data. However, be sure you are describing the device and not other things. (For instance, it would not be appropriate to describe the gasps of the audience or the weather conditions.) You may use your imagination to include extra details that are not provided in any of the accounts available, but they should be consistent and plausible.

You will sign up for a time slot; the time slot will be sometime during the week of the 29th.

First Paper

For your first paper, select one of the personalities described in the first three chapters of Edison's Eve other than Vaucanson, Kempelen, or Edison (after all, they have almost entire chapters devoted to them). Write a 3 or 4-page paper (depending on font, margins, etc. — roughly 1200–1400 words) that

• summarizes, in your own words, that person’s contribution to either the science of creating automata or to the philosophy of artificial life (e.g., “is man just a machine?” and similar issues),
• attempts to say something meaningful about that contribution — its importance in history, or its importance as a symbol of some significant concept, or perhaps the way it reflects some universal aspect of the way we view our place in the universe, . . . .

If you are extremely interested in writing about one of the three people whose names I omitted, see me and we'll negotiate something.

Your paper should adhere to the guidelines we've discussed about formal writing (for instance, third-person, no “loaded words,” etc.). It should have a meaningful title. Cite references for the facts you relate (I assume many of them will come from Wood's book, but we will discuss others), and you should have a formal list of references at the end. Use MLA style.

This paper will be due in installments. By Friday, 19 September you should hand in a (tentative) title and a description of your topic — what person are you writing about and what would you like to say?

By Monday, 22 September, you should hand in an outline of the paper, together with the list of references in appropriate MLA format.

By Friday, 26 September you should hand in a rough draft of at least the first portion of the paper (summary of the person's contribution), together with citations and the formal list of references.

Papers should be submitted in hard copy format only (no email submissions). They should be double-spaced. Pages should be numbered and your name and the date should appear on every page as part of a header.