

AUTOMATISM AND CREATIVE ACTS IN THE AGE OF NEW PSYCHOLOGY

The late nineteenth century saw a reexamination of artistic creativity in response to questions surrounding the relation between human beings and automata. These questions arose from findings in the “new psychology,” physiological research that diminished the primacy of mind and viewed human action as neurological and systemic. Concentrating on British and Continental culture from 1870 to 1911, this unique study explores ways in which the idea of automatism helped shaped ballet, art photography, literature, and professional writing. Drawing on documents including novels and travel essays, Linda Austin finds a link between efforts to establish standards of artistic practice and challenges to the idea of human exceptionalism. Austin presents each artistic discipline as an example of the same process: creation that should be intended, but involving actions that evade mental control. This study considers how late nineteenth-century literature and arts tackled the scientific question: Are we automata?

LINDA M. AUSTIN is Professor of English at Oklahoma State University. She has written on the connections between the fine arts, economics, and psychology. She is the author of *The Practical Ruskin* (1991) and *Nostalgia in Transition* (2007) as well as articles published in such journals as *English Literary History*, *Studies in Romanticism*, *MODERNISM/modernity*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, and *Modern Language Quarterly*.

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background,” feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

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*Automatism and Creative Acts in
the Age of New Psychology*

LINDA M. AUSTIN

Oklahoma State University



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Acknowledgments

The beginnings of this book are embedded in my last one and in my continuing exploration of physiological memory in an array of circumstances. Within the first year of work, I settled on examining physiological movement as a biological marker and efforts to suppress its register across aesthetic and artistic domains. My first venture into this area, a version of Chapter 2, appeared as a study of tourism and caches of pleasure in *English Literary History* 74 (2007): 629–73. A part of Chapter 1 was included in the spring 2009 contents of *World Picture*'s issue "Happiness"; and several years later, a relatively concise account of living and nonliving movement was published in *MODERNISM/modernity* 23, no. 1 (2016): 65–87. I am grateful to the anonymous readers of these journals for their part in shaping my thoughts. I especially acknowledge Debra Rae Cohen at *MODERNISM/modernity* for her clarifying editorial work and the editors of *World Picture*, Brian Price and Meghan Sutherland, for support of all sorts over the years. Thanks also to Linda Bree, of Cambridge University Press, for her courtesy and guidance during the stages of review and to the readers for their encouragement and advice.

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