



## Streaming Multimedia: Hydraulic Automata and the Arts of Perception in Descartes' *Treatise on Man*

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Recent scholarship on the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment has focused on the mediation of knowledge in material cultures, linking text production, information organization and scientific investigation to other domains such as the fine arts and popular entertainment. The traditional history of ideas has given way to studies of how such mediations inevitably shape – and often constitute – concepts previously seen as foundations: the conditions of possibility for thought itself. In my reading of Descartes' natural philosophy, I argue that the textual and material mediations of his physiology of perception open up “non-Cartesian” prospects for knowledge. Appropriating the hydraulic automata and musical instruments of garden grottoes, Descartes creates a space of baroque theater that displaces familiar dualisms such as mind vs. body, self vs. world, reality vs. illusion. Instead of rigid clockwork and repetitive automata, I propose an alternative view of Cartesian mechanism – an imaginative and provocative story of the surprising things machines can do.

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