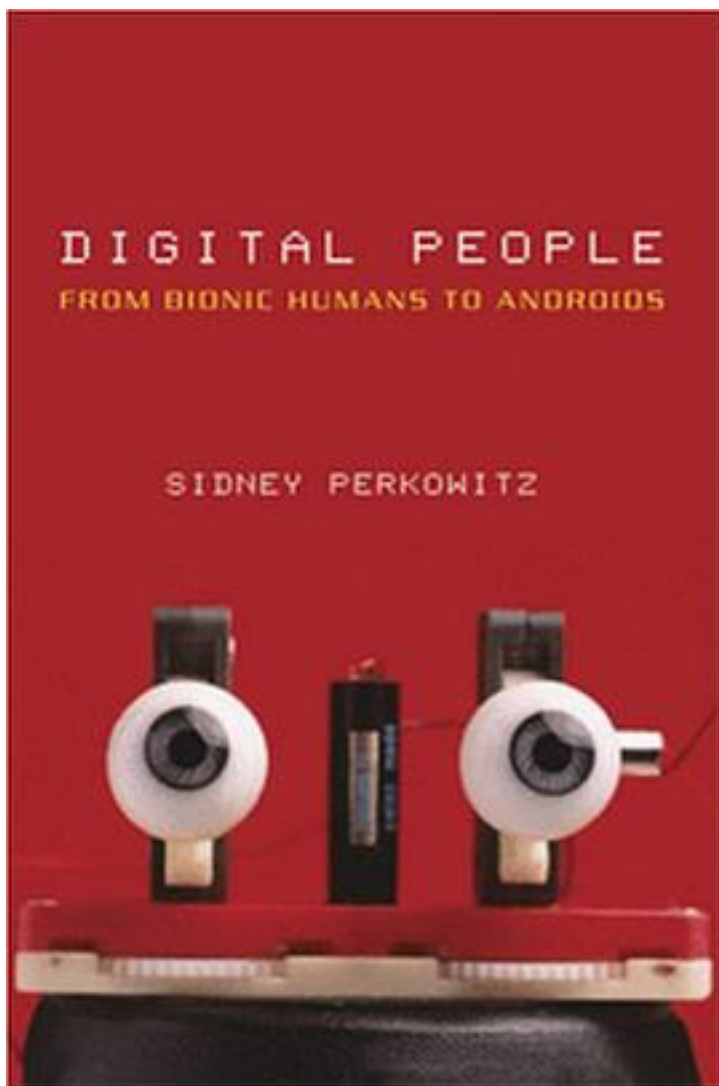


Digital People



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著者:Perkowitz, Sidney

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Robots, androids, and bionic people pervade popular culture, from classics like Frankenstein and R.U.R. to modern tales such as "The Six Million Dollar Man", "The Terminator", and "A.I." Our fascination is obvious and the technology is quickly moving from books and films to real life. In a lab at MIT, scientists and technicians have created an artificial being named COG. To watch COG interact with the environment to recognize that this machine has actual body language is to experience a hair-raising, gut-level reaction. Because just as we connect to artificial people in fiction, the merest hint of human-like action or appearance invariably engages us. "Digital People" examines the ways in which technology is inexorably driving us to a new and different level of humanity. As scientists draw on nanotechnology, molecular biology, artificial intelligence, and materials science, they are learning how to create beings that move, think, and look like people. Others are routinely using sophisticated surgical techniques to implant computer chips and drug-dispensing devices into our bodies, designing fully functional man-made body parts, and linking human brains with computers to make people healthier, smarter, and stronger. In short, we are going beyond what was once only science fiction to create bionic people with fully integrated artificial components and it will not be long before we reach the ultimate goal of constructing a completely synthetic human-like being. It seems quintessentially human to look beyond our natural limitations. Science has long been the lens through which we squint to discern our future. Although we are rightfully fearful about manipulating the boundaries between animate and inanimate, the benefits are too great to ignore. This thoughtful and provocative book shows us just where technology is taking us, in directions both wonderful and terrible, to ponder what it means to be human.

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