

# GHOST IN THE MACHINE

READING ROOM / MATERIALS  
selected by Carsten Nicolai

April 29 - June 25, 2016



Exhibition view, ghost in the machine, 2016

AG GEIGE | BERENICE ABBOTT | WILLIAM BASINSKI | RICHARD BUCKMINSTER FULLER | ALESSANDRO CORTINI | WILLIAM CROOKES | ELPH VS COIL | ANNE-JAMES CHATON | DELIA DERBYSHIRE | JACOB EPSTEIN | ALFRED EISENSTAEDT | HEINZ VON FOERSTER | SIGMUND FREUD | MARK FELL | CARSTEN GEBHARDT | MARTIN L. GORE | GRÖNLUND-NISUNEN | CARL MICHAEL VON HAUSSWOLFF | PONTUS HULTÉN | E.T.A. HOFFMANN | RYOJI IKEDA | IMMANUEL KANT | FRIEDRICH KITTLER | GRISCHA LICHTENBERGER | GYÖRGY LIGETI | MERZBOW | CONLON NANCARROW | PANASONIC | NAM JUNE PAIK | FRANCIS PICABIA | MARKO PELJHAN | PAUL VAN REEUWIJK | GERHARD RICHTER | WOLFRAM A. SCHEFFLER | KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN | RYUICHI SAKAMOTO | NIKOLA TESLA | ALAN TURING | JACQUES DE VAUCANSON | LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN | IANNIS XENAKIS | SIEGFRIED ZIELINSKI ... ETC.

## ghost in the machine - a random collection by Carsten Nicolai

The reformation of the human image through the machine is an idea that remains utopian: a dream-vision which began long before the digital age. *L'homme machine* (*Machine Man*) resembles clockwork. Descartes and La Mettrie are the central figures of a mechanical, natural, scientific doctrine in the course of the Enlightenment.

Clockwork symbolizes a world-view, too: in the Europe of the 18th century, one believed they could explain anything and everything—from the planetary system to the human being—using the principles of mechanics. Descartes reduced the living organism to its mechanical functions. He examined the human body as a machine-like system, comprised of an elaborate apparatus and a “mental substance / mind” (“*res cogitans*”). Through his eyes, it seemed possible to merge the organic with the mechanical.

Fascinating devices, like animatronic dolls or androids, triggered a vending-machine culture in the 18th century. The “Digesting Duck (mechanical duck)”, “Speaking Machine”, and “The Turk (chess Turk)” were the prototypes of a (seemingly) artificial intelligence. Today, we can observe similar attempts to represent machines in quasi-human bodies, a tactic meant to make us feel more comfortable interacting with robotics. Yet cloaking mechanical devices in a human-like form has exactly the opposite effect. Instead of feeling at ease, one can't help but feel unsettled in the presence of a machine in human costume. On one hand, we recognize our own likeness in such an object, yet we also sense the otherness, an uncanny, foreign quality that separates us from the device. In the end, the machine speaks its own language.



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Human beings build contraptions to fulfill specific tasks, yet we often forget that complex mechanical-systems also develop a life of their own. This independent existence is usually a byproduct, something unexpected and absent from the device's original plan. The exhibition, "ghost in the machine" explores this subject through a collection of objects, recordings, books, scripts, and writings. The collection shows processes of self-organization with unscheduled, faulty or erroneous mechanical sequences. Playing with the term "Deus ex machina", the machine is presented here as a device of deception: an autonomous producer of unnatural, unforeseen effects.

*The machines rose from the ashes of the nuclear fire. Their war to exterminate mankind had raged for decades, but the final battle would not be fought in the future. It would be fought here, in our present.*

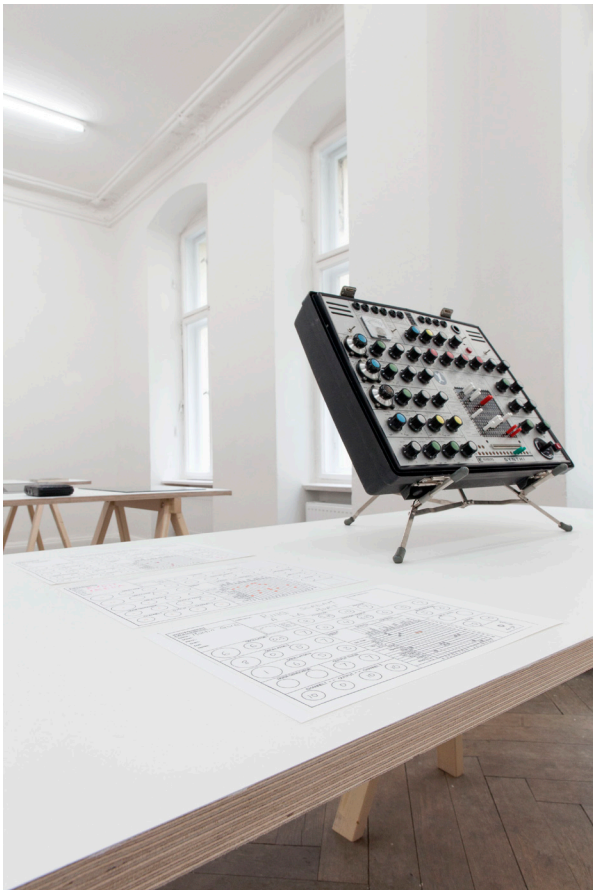
*Tonight . . .*

We are ready. Are you?

Text by *tm*



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