

BUTTONS

Some paradoxes
and loose ends
on rhythm,
release, man,
machine...

by Koen Sels

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As I try to write this, my baby weeps. She is not sad because the world is a deplorable and meaningless place. She does not care for meaning. She cares for food and poop and sleep and bright or soft colours and funny, repetitive sounds. According to psychoanalysts and the likes, she is a lust machine. It's an awfully helpless way of living, but for now, at least, the world cannot lose sense.



Adult life is marked by many tiresome rhythms, grinding on and on in our heads and hearts, second after second after second. New containers are registered in our ports, money is printed, license plates are manufactured, cookies are packed and labelled. The logic of the codes that regulate our material existence is that of a mathematical sequence: they will never ever stop adding up until the end of time. In doing so, they drum towards an ongoing future, which consists of more of roughly the same entity, creating the idea of a particular kind of infinity in the here and now of doing the groceries, taking the train, - an infinity of production, without becoming, which will only stop when a total catastrophe obliterates all.

As the machine vomits more and more of the same things, our inner voices cut life into syntax. They hardly ever shut up, and when they do, we don't even know about it, because to know about it, is to start the yickedy yack yack all over again. One would almost crave a personal apocalypse, thinking of this sorry double bind.

Most of the time these rhythms just hum along, unnoticed or mind-numbingly abstract, but sometimes they really open up like an unfathomable abyss of dead and senseless time. On these moments, human meaning suddenly finds itself at war with its inner metronome, and all one hears is a dumb ticking of sounds that seem to have lost all sense. The horror! Who would not want to be released from that desire for meaning, which can

create so much unrest? To stop and dance in self-referential circular movements on the unfolding axis of time, to give oneself away and let go, to surrender to whatever transcends our codes and words.

Because rhythm can also release us from ourselves - that is, we need to be released from one part of ourselves in order to become the other, seemingly truer, part. In the pointless energy of music, patterns and dances for example, lies a *mechanism* that is paradoxically very *human*. People ritually capitulate to mechanical forces to drive away the humanoid demons of meaning and time. We repeat mantras until we seem to hover above their words, dance for more than 24 hours on end to pounding techno music to destroy the difference between day and

night, make long walks to silence the prefab pop songs in our heads. Of course, we always get sucked back into our belief in discourses and day-to-day morals, but once in a while, we need to feel their edges to be able to bear them. We need to feel there's matter beneath our feet.



The concepts of man and machine are like those of nature and culture. They generate each other, cannot exist without each other: what we call mechanical is mirrored by what

we call human. From whatever angle one looks at both, man and machine will always intersect at some point.

A machine, it is said, does not desire. Yet desire works pretty much like a machine; it is not the result of human reason ('Now that we know the data, let us desire this and that'), but acts more or less according to a subconscious, mechanical pattern. Who are we humans then, what part of us can we identify ourselves with? Are we individuals who consciously and autonomously push our own buttons in deciding whether or not to act on our desire? Or are we, deep down, still lust machines, automatic and dumb, a clockwork orange. Impossible and grotesque man-machine-hybrids? Even our conscious mind is wired in a

particular way, genetically and culturally and in other ways. Life and language may be creative, but human beings are definitely not abstract and airy realms of free spirit caged in bodies.



The video diptych 'Lady Glass & Operator' by Ben Van den Berghe - with a soundtrack by Edi Danartono

(aka Orang Baru) could be read as an allegory of the human desire to be released from its own humanity via the mechanical (and vice versa). One panel shows a revolving transparent sculpture of a cyborg-like human being, produced in Dresden in 1967, which Van den Berghe discovered at the Museum of Technology in Warsaw. By the press of a button, an operator can activate the rotating artefact to light up different organs in an educational presentation. The semi-mechanical operator on the other panel reminds us of Kraftwerk's 'man machine'. As he lights up different parts of her body, layers of electronic music are added to the repetitive sounds of the revolving machine of the 'Glass Lady'. The electronic beats accompany her post-religious yet highly spiritual dervish movements

(a ritual on which the artist made another video). The work also exists as an installation in which the minimal electronic sounds are produced live in an exhausting – seemingly endless – performance by Danartono with only a drum machine in his hands. The artist – a living sculpture on a pedestal as well as an ‘operator’ himself – interacts with the visual and mechanical rhythms of the two-channel video.

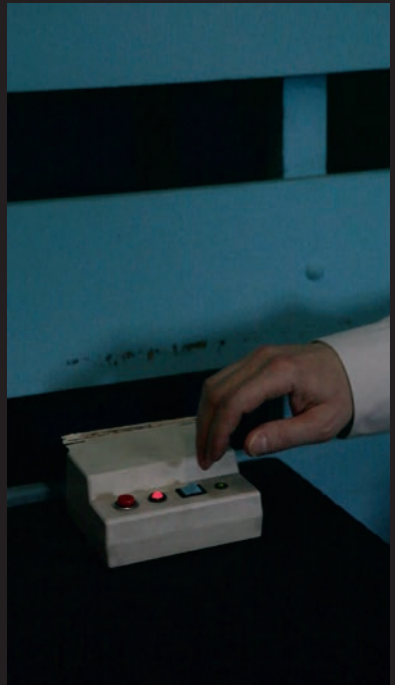
Freed from its didactic context, the Glass Lady becomes a dancing sculpture that has no use but to dance to the rhythm of her own body. Everything about her is perfectly repetitive and mechanical. She does not move anywhere, she moves around her own axis, a body enjoying its own gravitational pull. Man and machine are fully mixed-up: the lady robot

is exemplary for the human race, the operator is truly human but moves automatically and looks like he’s only a function of the button. The work stages our dedication to, once in a while, be released and have someone else, or some mechanical force, push our buttons and make us dance, dance, dance.



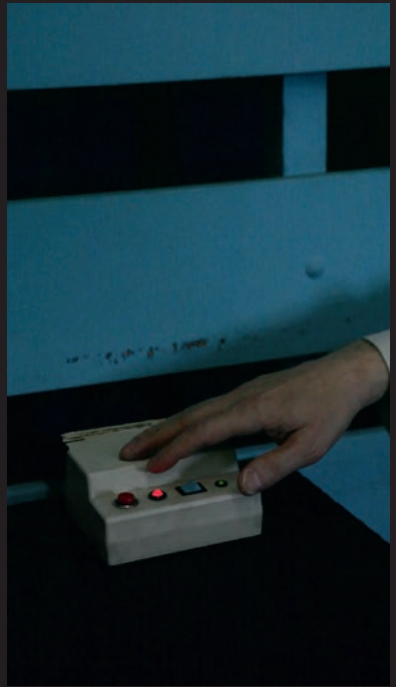
On the following pages video stills from
Lady Glass & Operator, 2016
by Ben Van den Berghe & Edi Danartono













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was released on the occasion of the art work

Lady Glass & Operator

by Ben Van den Berghe & Edi Danartono

as part of the exhibition

On Dedication

Corridor Project Space, Amsterdam

07 October – 05 November 2016

curated by Harald den Breejen

www.benvandenbergh.com

www.danartono.com

www.corridorprojectspace.com

