

**deus::ex::machina**  
*human geography in a virtual world*

**:: A Telematic Performance Fusing Dance, Digital Broadcast, Distributed Authorship, and Real Time Interaction**

**:: A New Work by Louise Coetzer**

**:: Performed by Darkroom Contemporary, with Interactive Design by Thingking**

**deus::ex::machina** is a physical expression of human geography, a search for finding connection within chaos. This multiplayer game invites viewers to meet online or IRL in a shared experience of simulated connection. This virtual experience is driven by you, the viewer, and demonstrates a real time exercise in cause and effect, infinite probability and random points of connection. In this extended reality, we portray the uniqueness of the individual, and the commonality of the human experience.

**CONCEPT :: deus::ex::machina** results in a series of interactive public performances which puts the viewer in control of the outcome, in real time, speaking to the digitisation of our collective current experiences. This dialogue between real & virtual, human & digital, colliding indefinitely. While we experience global physical isolation, our connections entirely dependent on technology, our realities filtered through algorithms - how close are we to being controlled; or are we the ones in control? **deus::ex::machina** becomes a physical embodiment of man vs machine.

A website is being developed by designer-maker consultancy Thingking, which can be accessed via mobile phone. The site will present the viewer with options and choices along the way, these affecting the actual unfolding of the work. The audience controls the dancers through their devices.

**deus::ex::machina** will be staged in public spaces in Cape Town, where audiences can view the work from their cars or while socially distanced, and simultaneously broadcast as live - stream to an online audience anywhere in the world. We are also exploring possibilities around transposing the performance into vastly diverse locations, some of them only accessible to an online audience while others allow for both live and online audiences. The experience as online vs. IRL audience member will be similar, with both offering the viewer many possibilities to affect the outcome. No two performances will be the same, and no audience experience will be the same.

**PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCE ::** A central website presents the viewer with options to select from: they choose a dancer, a soundtrack and a series of numbers representing the different choreographic phrases. Along the journey, audience members enter their choices, which are counted as votes with the most popular being chosen. These choices are sent to the dancers as a set of "instructions", via headphones, and as ensemble, each dancer follows their own unique combination as selected by their viewers.

In unison, a randomised version of a set choreographic work unfolds, the dancers dancing to a click track accompaniment. Each audience experience is unique, as viewers choose from different musical accompaniment options, which are sent via broadcast to the live audience's cars or headphones, and to the online viewer once they've made a musical selection. The online viewer has further choice between which camera view they want to follow during the live stream.

After the first cycle, the dancers receive the next set of audience inputs, to continue their unique interpretations of the choreographic phrases. Each choice results in a unique interaction between the dancers as unit and as individuals, while also determining which conclusion each audience member draws based on the unique musical selections they made along the way.

At this intersection between art and technology, CODA experiments with new, interactive media and speaks to the digitisation of our collective current experiences. This dialogue between real & virtual, human & digital, colliding indefinitely.

## **CENTRAL THEMES ::**

**1. CONNECTION :: Points of Connection, Counterpoint, Physical Connection, Virtual Connection - deus::ex::machina** is an augmented landscape driven by you, the viewer, and demonstrates a real time exercise in cause and effect, infinite probability and random connection points. The digital visitor enters the space through the browser on a smartphone, and is faced with a real world location in Cape Town, and five dancers standing by to interpret the selections in real time.

Simultaneously, the visitor is joined by all the other virtual visitors, as the dashboard displays how many others are sharing the space, which choices they are voting for and how they are controlling the components. The choreography is a physical expression of this. As ensemble, the dancers each follow their own unique combination of inputs as voted by the viewers. In unison, a randomised version of a set choreographic work unfolds, a real time, physical expression of counterpoint; missed, caught or elapsed connections.

**2. HUMAN MOVEMENT PATTERNS ::** COVID - 19 placed limits on how and where we can move in public space. **deus::ex::machina** expresses how the movements & trajectories of people moving in public space unknowingly create a large scale choreography. Now, more than ever, we are acutely aware of our physicality in relation to others.

**3. DEMOCRACY :: INFLUENCE :: ALGORITHM ::** Algorithms are increasingly present in our daily lives and decision-making processes. In real time, you also see the choices being made by the other visitors in the virtual world with you. Do those influence the choices you make?

**4. POWER & CONTROL :: MAN vs MACHINE ::** This is the **deus::ex::machina** virtual world the visitor interacts with and controls. By making a series of selections, the viewer creates their own unique experience of the work - choices impact the dancer you control, the soundtrack you experience, the order in which the choreography unfolds, the way in which the dancers connect with each other, and elements of the set/landscape.

***No two performances are the same, and no audience experience will be the same.***

***Who is ultimately in control? Man or Machine?***

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