



DEU\$/EXM4CHIN4 by Fernando Belfiore

Context article¹ by Zeynep Gündüz

Who are the gods from the machines?

Deus ex machina, which means “god from the machine”, is a Greek term that refers to a specific theatrical plot device whereby a seemingly unsolvable problem is solved by the intervention of a god descending from the sky on a crane. So deus ex machina functions to move the story forward. In my work, the term deus ex machina deviates from its original meaning. *DEU\$/EXM4CHIN4* is about questioning who the gods from the machines are in the first place. The piece questions matters of control in society: Who’s controlling what? And who’s serving whom? And it questions relations of power at different levels - from the personal to the construction of theatre and society as a whole. Unlike deus ex machina, *DEU\$/EXM4CHIN4* does not offer a solution to the problem. Each scene changes by an external force that triggers the body to complete the performative event.

Where are we going?

In *DEU\$/EXM4CHIN4* I try to expose certain power relations and forces operating through the notion of the machine in different but interrelated ways. To start with, I approach machines as performers. Taking daily life as a surrounding, in the piece, I aim to make visible the (un)hidden relations of possessions using theatre to recreate spaces. There is a scene where a large number of machines are placed onstage. By populating the space with machines and the body of the performers I want to unfamiliarize our relationship to the machine as our bodily extensions. With this performance another aspect that I want to highlight is about the idea of energy consumption and dependence. In fact, once during the rehearsal we caused a power outage in the building due to an overloading of the electricity mains! Finally, I explore the notion of energy through the four performers onstage. Each performer exposes a different energy with which they transform into icons, superheroes, spiritual healers and fighters. By passing through different realities, I aim to create an epic journey where each performer has a total non-automatized and yet very machinic (not mechanic) performativity and relation to the audience.

Next, I want to question the notion of physical empowerment offered by machines and the idea that machines facilitate more time to enjoy life. Yet, which experiences are being created through our consumption of machines and where are the promises? To problematize this point, in *D3US/XM4CHIN4*, I don’t use machines for what they are designed for. I take the function of the machines out of their context: the vacuum cleaner is not used for cleaning and the drill is not used for drilling. Like this the machines function to create the poetics and affects onstage.

So *DEU\$/EXM4CHIN4* points to certain contradictions in our understanding of and our relationship with machines. The piece becomes more complex as it addresses such contradictions from a broader perspective where the cultural, economical, and political conditions that we have created in society are understood as a machine. Cultural machinery,

¹ This article is written on the basis of an interview held with Fernando Belfiore on October 24th, 2015 in Amsterdam.

economical machinery, or even relational machinery...they all present certain norms to which we conform in society; for example rules on gender, ritual, and social media. This points to a paradox: we create our personal bodily extensions through machines that serve us. At the same time, we subordinate ourselves incorporating this machinery.

Witnessing provocative thoughts

In *D3US/XM4CHIN4*, I aim to create a particular poetic universe that questions certain conditions in the world we are living in instead of offering solutions. This is the principle of my communication and relationship with the audience. In *DEUS/EXM4CHIN4* I avoid giving a message or making a statement, such as machines are good or bad but I look for an integration or a (con)fusion of things instead of showing simple dichotomies. I try not to explain too much; instead, I construct an experience for the audience, hoping that this triggers different logics. In my work, I also deal with emotions but the emotions do not necessarily rise from where we would expect them.

In the case of *D3US/XM4CHIN4*, I frame the paradoxical conditions imposed by the machineries and extensions that we have constructed. I invite the audience to actively engage with the experience being produced on the stage and to witness provocative thoughts but and mainly to evoke sensorial openings offered by the performance.

Bio's

Fernando Belfiore graduated in 2011 from the School for New Dance Development, Amsterdam School of The Arts. His graduation work, *The miserable thing*, received the "Best Direction" award at ACT Festival in Spain in 2012. He is Artist In Residence at the production house Dansmakers Amsterdam since 2011 where he made his solo *You Must* (2011), *whatdofinallyshare*. (2013), and *AL13FB<3* (2014). His works are intense, energetic, and strongly visceral and visual. Searching for new forms of engagement within the audience's bodily experience and in the performer's presence are strong characteristics of his work.

Zeynep Gündüz (Ph.D) is a dance researcher, and dance history & theory teacher at the Amsterdam School of the Arts, and teaches philosophy of culture at Codarts. She also works as conceptual advisor and is board member of Vereniging voor Dansonderzoek.