

Andrea Bozic



Nothing Can Surprise Us



NOTHING CAN SURPRISE US

*'When is the lift off?
You are already underway!
Solaris*

Nothing Can Surprise Us is a performance about preparing for the future. On stage, a small crew is filming a catastrophe survival scene. But the scene gets constantly interrupted by scenes from other films. Where these other films come from and why remains a mystery. As they try to make sense of what is going on, the catastrophe they rehearsed seems to have come true already. But is it really a catastrophe? And what is real? *Nothing Can Surprise Us* is a self fulfilling prophecy: it plays with strategies of fictionalising one's life and how these scenarios become real through the process of rehearsing them. A performance with movement, film, video, music and (a bit of) text.

The initial idea comes from the so called *Nothing Can Surprise Us*-day that used to take place once a year in former Yugoslavia. On that day, the entire country would rehearse a situation of nationwide catastrophe. It was everyone's favourite day. Rehearsing a catastrophe turned the country into a big playground. When the war really started, however, no one really knew what to do.

Based on the scenes from the following movies: *Das Boot* by Wolfgang Petersen, *Blade Runner* by Ridley Scott, *Solaris* by Andrei Tarkovsky, *Birds* by Alfred Hitchcock.

Credits:

Concept & Choreography **Andrea Bozic** in collaboration with Video & Concept **Julia Willms** Music **Robert Pravda** Performers **Guillem Mont de Palol, Hendrik de Smedt, Sarah Vanhee** Dramaturgical advice **Bram de Sutter** Light design **Paul Schimmel** Costume **Nathalie Pravda**

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Nothing Can Surprise Us is a performance about preparing for future by rehearsing possible future catastrophe scenarios. While rehearsing these scenarios, the experience that one prepares for is already lived, and therefore becomes real through the process of rehearsing. *Nothing Can Surprise Us* is a piece about strategies of fictionalising one's own life and of one's live presence through various imagined scenarios and how these scenarios then create tangible reality. It is about how this process is both a powerful driving force that shapes reality and, at the same time, an escape from the reality of here and now. This process is never clearly one or the other but both forces work in interaction, producing space for personal projection of fantasy and emotion. When several such personal projections come into interaction, something unpredictable is produced. *Nothing Can Surprise Us* is about how we deal with unpredictable and unimaginable. It is a multimedia performance that combines dance/movement, film, video, music and (some) text into a single live event.

The initial idea and the title for this performance are borrowed from the so called *Nothing Can Surprise Us* day that used to take place once a year in former Yugoslavia, where I grew up. On that day, the entire country would stop all other activities and rehearse a situation of nationwide catastrophe. Those days no one missed school – it was, in fact, everyone's favourite day. Rehearsing a catastrophe turned the country into a big playground. When the war really started, however, no one really knew what to do.



A lot of the doomsday, nuclear disaster, climate change, bird flu, terrorist attack scenarios that repeatedly appear in the past years, remind me of the *Nothing Can Surprise Us* days from my childhood in the 70-ies and 80-ies. It feels almost like the media are providing for an ongoing drama in our lives, borrowing the strategies from theatre. *Nothing Can Surprise Us* focuses on the role that films play in announcing, processing, embodying and living through possible collective or personal doomsday scenarios. The project underlines the role films have as unconscious models for fictionalising our own lives, for telling ourselves stories about it (with a hope for a grand narrative) and their role as contemporary myths in the exchange and communication of personal experience. They also prepare the 'stage' for a certain way of thinking - through imagining and filming certain scenarios, these scenarios become imaginable and pave the way for their embodiment in our 'real' lives. In turn, this real life then produces films to reflect on it.

The films used for the making of the script for the performance include: *Das Boot* by Wolfgang Petersen, *Blade Runner* by Ridley Scott, *Solaris* by Andrei Tarkovsky and *The Birds* by Alfred Hitchcock. Each of the movies has a very specific approach to presenting and defining a real catastrophe. *Das Boot* is a war movie set in a German U-boat during World War II; *Blade Runner* introduces transhumanity and what it means to be human when there is no longer a distinction between a human and its copy; *Solaris* features an existential catastrophe where there is no distinction between the physical and imagined world; *The Birds* presents nature gone inexplicably wild.

The multimedia setup has an important role in the dramaturgy of the theatre space. The audio-visual media have a status of an active dramaturgical ingredient and co-creator of rules of reality and fiction on stage, together with the performers. The media are a stage element that actively create presence, and partake in the strategies of fictionalising the present moment, in creating and affecting the content of the performance through interaction with live performers. The entire setup of the performance is based on a 'generator'. The generator means that these rules and interactions on stage produce a world of interplay on various levels. *Nothing Can Surprise Us* was created through a process of expanding this generator in rehearsal: Three performers copying material from various catastrophe films played on a small monitor on stage and performing it live. Then this material is filmed on locations and projected live on stage behind the three performers. A live camera films the performers together with the background image, projecting its output onto a separate screen. This has produced a situation of two facing mirrors: performers copy and embody a fiction presented on a small monitor but are themselves filmed embodying this fiction live on stage. The audience follows them both live and projected on screen, through the eye of the camera. A live musician takes over a role of a folly artist creating live immersive filmic soundscape for the theatre space. A camerawoman helps direct the gaze of the audience live. Finally, in the later part of the performance, scenes from previous stages of the performance are mixed with the live recorded scenes. This creates a feedback loop of producing presence through copying and mixing imagined and live presence also on the linear level. Please see the attached drawing for an image of the 'generator'.





The performers are spiders in the web of moments that belong to several worlds at once, embodying and enacting multiple fictions and functions through their own body and experience. By enacting fictional material and performing it with choreographic motivation (copying and embodying material), the performers perform a certain doubleness of being: they are both here and now - in their own bodies, and at the same time, somewhere else - in a film that has nothing to do with them or with this moment, is only fantasised. This doing 'as if' this is really happening makes the experience become *almost* real. There is only a tiny distinction between acting like something is happening and feeling it is really happening, in terms of the experience of both the one doing it and the one observing it. This tiny distinction paves the way for a process in which preparing for the future makes it already a reality, and creates future. In other words, pretending something is happening has made it already happen.

Wired: *Blade Runner* was prescient in many ways, anticipating globalization, genetic engineering, biometric security. How do you gauge the movie's influence?

Scott: Enormous. One of the top architects in the world told me he used to run it in his office once a month. (...) A big clothing designer sent me pictures of the interior of his place, and the factories looked like *Blade Runner*. Hotels in New York started to look like the movie.

(from an interview with Ridley Scott in *Wired*)

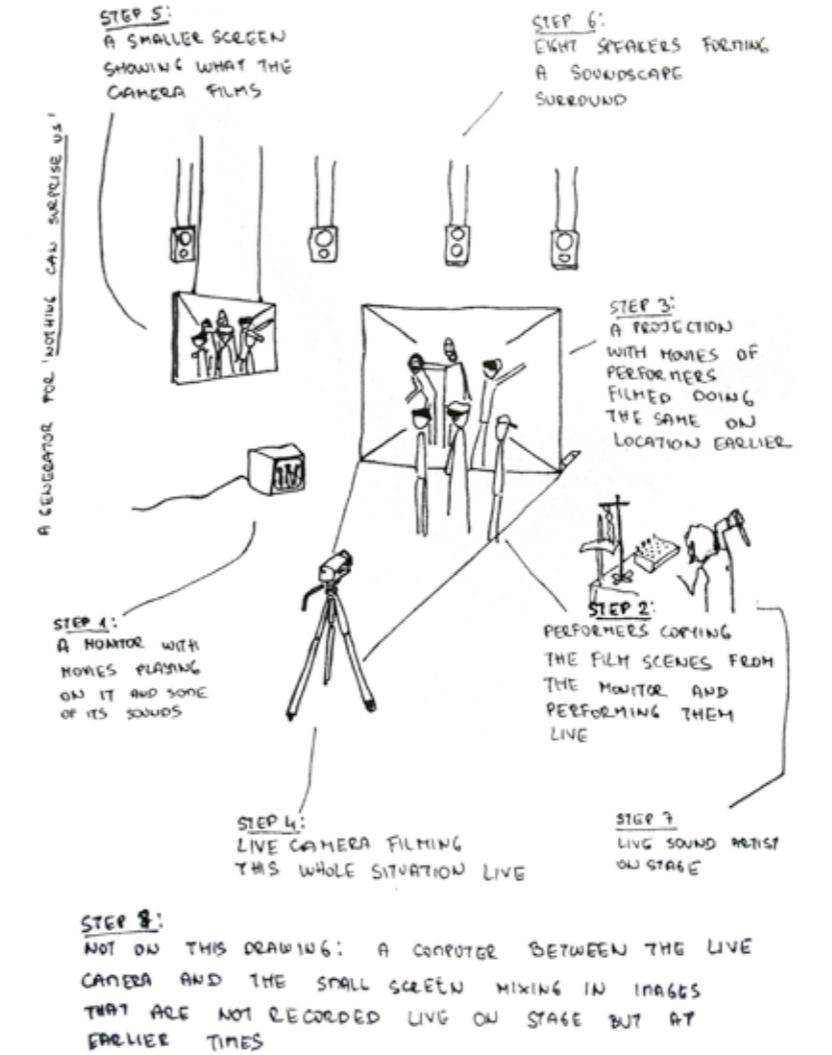
This tension between film and live performance, narrative material and its choreographic treatment, fictional gesture embodied by real people in the now, creates a multimedia language for this performance. This way it feeds on another tension: that of a society based on reproduction of experience which, at the same time, uses this reproduction to create new experience, re-creating itself in this process.

As during the Nothing Can Surprise Us Days, so in *Nothing Can Surprise Us*, the performance, rehearsing a catastrophe or a doomsday scenario has two sides to it. On the one hand, it provides tragic overtones and a taste of drama to a person's life and an accompanying momentary 'sense' of purpose. On the other hand, rehearsing means knowing that we are doing 'as if', which is an inherently theatrical situation. This doing 'as if' gives the moment of rehearsal the adrenaline rush, the excitement, a possibility of living an experience, and at the same time, the safe ground of it being only a rehearsal. It becomes about playing a game and celebrating the moment of now by playing out the fear of an experience that is unthinkable. What is produced by this double state, is a question of catastrophe not as total erasure but as a state of not knowing any longer which reality one inhabits (as in *Solaris*).

Nothing Can Surprise Us uses material from film as a 'script' for a live performance, where the two media (film and performance) produce an interdisciplinary stage format. It is an interdisciplinary performance that comprises of fragments from various disciplines, as well as from my personal experience. It combines the choreography of narrativity, and the embodiment of fiction that are produced through the juncture of old media (theatre, performance, dance) and new media (new sound and video technologies).

This performance asks the question about how virtual our experiences already are. Is imagining not a virtual experience? The fact that we feed on virtual experiences has given birth to the type of media we have created. In turn, these media have altered the way we virtualise our experiences. *Nothing Can Surprise Us* lingers on this notion through exploring the joy of playing catastrophe scenarios.

'The problem with the twentieth-century 'passion for the Real' was not that it was a passion for the Real, but that it was a fake passion whose ruthless pursuit of the Real behind appearances was the *ultimate stratagem to avoid confronting the Real...*' (from Slavoj Zizek: *Welcome To The Desert of the Real*)



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