

ADDRESSING AMNESIA PERFORMING TRAUMA

edited by
Kathrin Heinrich
and
Frida Robles Ponce

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Places that are no more or not yet: Interview with Claudia Bosse

Frida Robles Ponce

It is difficult to introduce an artist with such a complex and varied body of work as Claudia Bosse as it expands from theater, dance, video, poetry, interventions, and other forms. However, one can state that each of Bosse's pieces emerges and reflect upon philosophical ideas and perspectives of action in everyday life. Straddling the border between the imaginary and the real, Claudia Bosse always finds the political. The political that shapes the form in which we engage with our surroundings, be it the urban space, our dreams, our bodies, or each other. Born in Germany but having resided in Austria for most of her artistic career, Bosse reflects on both societies' violent and often forgotten pasts. As noted on theatercombinat's website – a trans-disciplinary company directed by Bosse –, “her works negotiates forms of violence, history, and concrete utopias.”¹ For this publication, I found it pertinent to engage with the thoughts Bosse embodies in her latest performance, ORACLE and SACRIFICE in the woods (2021/2).² In it our cohabitation with different species and their temporalities are brought to the forefront.

FR: I want to discuss one of your most recent works, ORACLE and SACRIFICE in the woods.³ Can you tell me more about your interest in connecting the concepts of the oracle and the sacrifice?

CB: There is something so profoundly connected: the concept of an oracle is impossible without sacrifice. From a poetic outlook, the idea of a future always needs a sacrifice, especially when something gets stripped of its mundane context. There is a profound transition of getting into a different assimilation system and losing its connection to the profane. There is a sacrifice in the shift from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Another aspect is my long-standing interest in mythology, of trying to open it up and understand that sacrifice is a practice, a tribute. Sacrifice must always be a tribute to something; I give a tribute and understand the ecological dependency.

It's not possible to set them apart. I was also interested in thinking about death and the understanding of death in our society. We have to face violence and violent acts, not to praise them but not to close our eyes. We must see the acts of violence that create wounds and scars, in ecosystems, social relations, social systems, etc.

FR: I'm very interested in the reflection of violence that can be read as a covert theme in this performance. It seems like an inquiry into our violent relationship with nature, especially concerning the organization of cities. What reflection do you want to trigger in the audience with this performance?

CB: There are different layers of understanding that I am interested in. One is to accept our fragile lives and the transformation of death as a part of our being. We are a part of a specific temporal manifestation of matter, which will then transform into other matter. We can think differently about our lives when we accept transformation as an inherent condition. Secondly, to understand that we adjust our position according to our surroundings, to glimpse at the non-eternal being, and acknowledge that, in this lifetime, we produce acts that continue to resonate around us. There's a particular carefulness in realizing that we are part of a system and that every action resonates within it somewhere else. For me, it's essential to comprehend that our human system – as a culture – is just one possibility. Another layer is that there will never be living without violence. To be aware of and recall it is an essential training in our human condition. We can easily forget about it and practice our moralistic, supercritical life while being unaware of all the violence we imprint in other areas. For example, urban tourist attractions are mostly built on oppression. Also, the consumerist manner in which we consume cities has become our daily practice.

FR: Why did you decide to show it in the woods, particularly in the Prater in Vienna? Being such a historically charged place.

CB: In times of COVID, I often visited the Prater because of a lack of travel. I tried to travel through it. I knew about the world exhibition celebrated in 1873 and the transformation of the hunting fields. I was very interested in the historical reconstruction of the plots realized for the world exhibition. I was also aware of the regulation of the Danube in 1870, which changed the city tremendously and was linked with this exhibition for which authorities reconstructed the whole Prater area. I treated this as a general historical background, like inscriptions and wounds in a landscape.

The specific area I performed in still has traces of the forest before the Danube regulations. The location I chose has no geometrical planting. It's a landscape where you can still find old silver plain trees – pioneer plants in this flooding area of the Danube. There's also a landscape of transition. Due to the Danube regulations, the land gets drier and drier, causing the existing plants to change; for example, specific vegetation will die and won't be able to renew itself. The vegetation needs to change to adapt to the surrounding, but there are these areas where you still have remains of the older landscape. This is one of the areas that is not cleaned up, where the fleeting and becoming are intertwined.

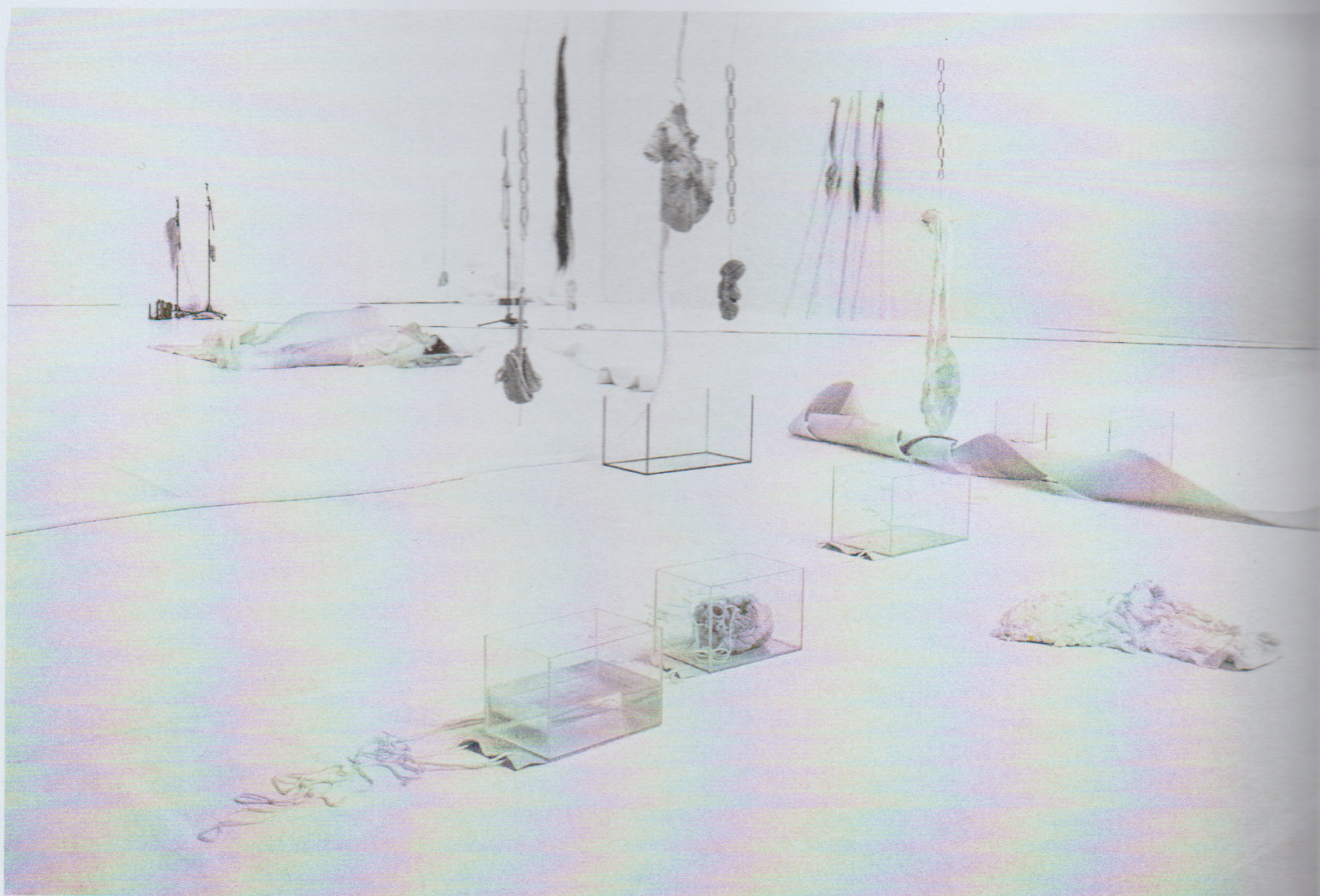
FR: In what way can the history of the organization of the Danube be considered an act of violence?

CB: The organization of spaces is a means of violence, especially against fish species and free movement between various trees, insects, and animal species. The biotopes along the Danube are getting drier and drier, and if you talk about

¹Theatercombinat website, Theatercombinat, accessed September 15, 2022, http://www.theatercombinat.com/index_en.html.

² Claudia Bosse, *Oracle and Sacrifice Part 1*, Vimeo, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://vimeo.com/749511999>. *Oracle and Sacrifice Part 2*, Vimeo, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://vimeo.com/744887744>.

³ Claudia Bosse, *Oracle and Sacrifice Project*, Theatercombinat, accessed September 15, 2022, http://www.theatercombinat.com/projekte/oraclesacrifice/os_woods_en.html.



ORACLE and SACRIFICE I, Tanzquartier Wien, 2020.
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the mobilities, the free movement of the river is entirely restricted. These areas depend on how much water they get from the so-called dotation of the hydroelectric power plant, so they are regulated. How feasible it is for other animals to live there depends on the water rotation, which alters the regular water flow. Now, there are two separate side arms of the Danube. This urban organization of nature and the river has resulted in a disturbance of different species' lives.

FR: Another vital aspect of this performance is the presence of organs, almost alive organs, like the lung artificially breathing in the woods. They make me think of the concept crafted by Deleuze and Guattari of the "Body without Organs." What is your reflection in connection to the organs?

CB: While researching oracles, I was interested in understanding an organ as a kind of text for the future, and I found a fascinating Babylonian tradition, the liver oracle. In this particular ceremony, one would whisper a question in the ear of an animal that would be sacrificed. When one slaughtered it and opened the body doing a visceral show, and the sunlight touched the organs, Babylonians thought one could read the gods' wish in the animal's liver. The liver was considered the body's central organ. Later, when cultures focused more on mechanization, that perspective shifted to the heart. Babylonians understood breath to be coming from the liver, not the lungs. It is fascinating how the imaginary of the body's organization is intrinsically connected with shifting ideologies and epistemologies. I asked myself how it is possible, in our current condition, to confront ourselves with different views of organs, organisms, and organ ideologies. For me, it is crucial to smell them, observe the material, and see the beauty of the bodily organs. What are the textures like? What are the activations and reactions, the density of the tissue, and the colors?

The lung featured in the performance perhaps also had to do with the pandemic, to understand a zone of invisible danger or invisible violence, where suddenly a virus can enter and damage your system. I was curious to understand what breathing movement is. What is the organization of the lung? How is it blowing up? It's also a machine; we need regularity in our body so our cells can survive. In capitalism, the optimization of the body is crucial. Hence, I'm interested in the meta-capitalist body's functionality and ideology and confronting it with different ways of knowing.

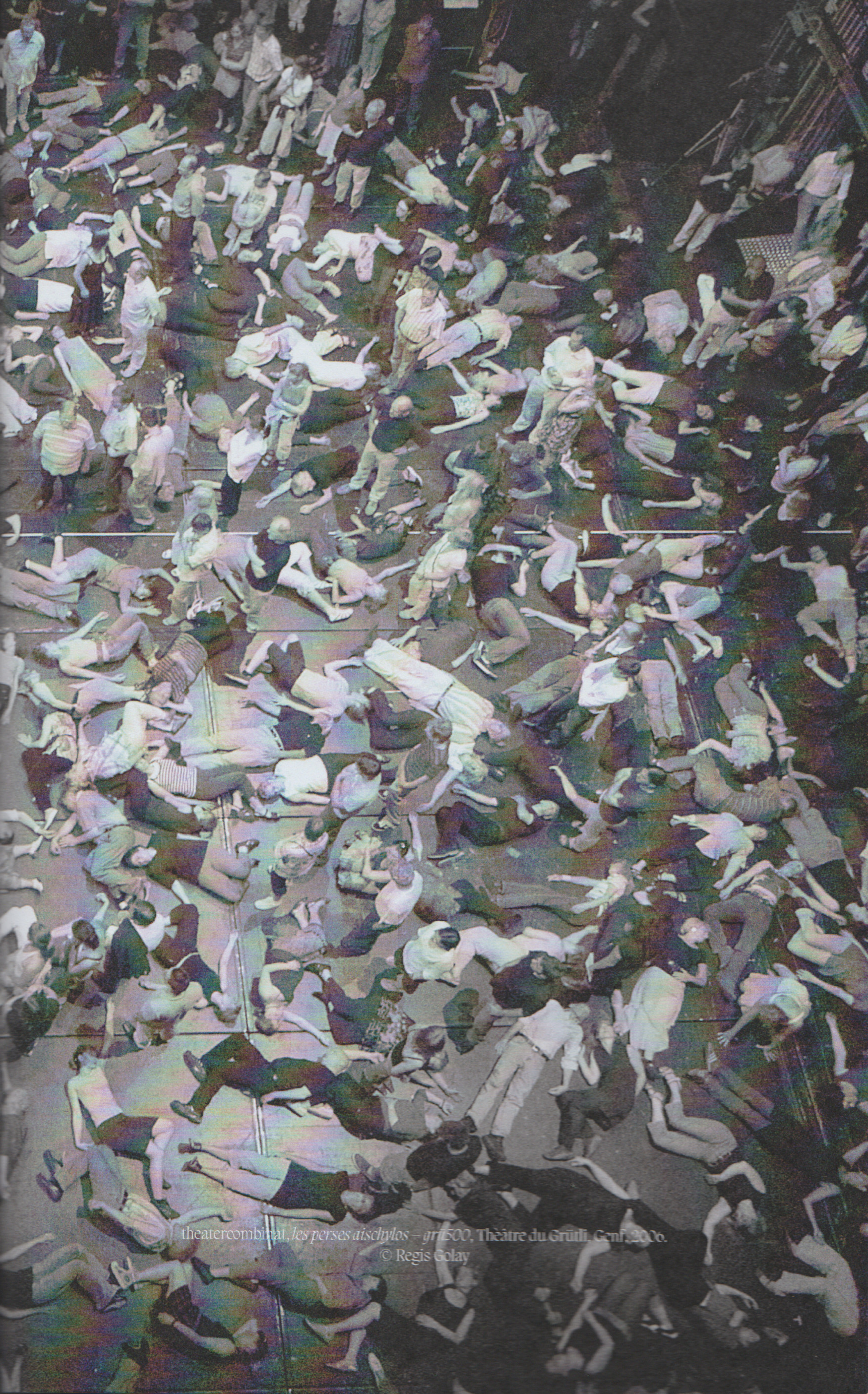
FR: Would you consider this performance eco-feminist?

CB: Only after beginning my research did I learn what eco-feminism was. However, I would say yes, because my relation to the existing matter has much to do with a feminist standpoint. Being a mother, an artist, doing what I am doing and what I have been doing is all from a feminist perspective. However, it took me very long to understand myself as such fully. For example, I always considered myself a Marxist, but then thinking about its economic approach of seeing nature as a resource makes me think of a violent and dominant perspective, very much rooted in a male position. And then, it becomes complex to position oneself as a Marxist. We require a radically different and more feminist perspective.

FR: Why is space so crucial for you? You have had a long career of performance practice in connection with space. For example, your work *168 Stunden* (a tribute to everyday life and Franz Erhard Walther)⁴, in which you, together with Bettina Vismann, lived for one week on a vacant lot in Vienna (2018)⁵, or your massive intervention at the Maria-Theresien-Platz in Vienna turn terror into sport (2007).

CB: Space always reminds me of the human condition, the imagination of places and their transformation, and the labor and knowledge required to create such spaces. For my artistic practice – a way of questioning my ideas – I always need a concrete manifestation in time and space within which I can learn and prove assumptions. For my work to exist, there needs to be a concrete space with which I can engage. This space of exploration is often in transition –





theatercombinat, *les perses* aischylos – gri 500, Théâtre du Grütli, Genf, 2006.

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taking this in-between time as a specific ecology embedded in space. This space and time in transition can refer to speculation of its future or potentialities. Perhaps I'm overall interested in the temporality inscribed in all spaces. I'm intrigued and inspired by places that are no more or not yet. I often used them as my pieces' framework, inspiration, and core ingredients.

FR: How would you describe your practice in connection to this space-time liminality?

CB: I think these in-between spaces, ruptures, and out-of-attention areas, are spaces where the constitution of our being can be considered and learned from. Sometimes it is about understanding or grabbing, digging, turning, and accepting; or embracing the places of the not-yet-known on never-knowing or, sometimes, having a temporal glimpse of something you cannot perfectly translate into terminology. My practice is informed by theater, choreography, fine arts, poetry, and philosophy. Still, it's tough to say where I fit in. In practice, it has much to do with disciplinary shifts and activating the space between them. It's about language and movement, not only the narrative as it would be in traditional theater formats. My practice still engages with installation, but often it is set in a time-based continuation in a space. Perhaps it has to do with these transitional spheres. Something can happen there; it can become sediment within the art practice. The wished or unwanted articulations overlap in how the earth is a landscape or the urban ruins in a city. It's about understanding that the space is so full already. So, how to give or test or insist on specific attention? With a closer look, it gets a profound understanding, which sends a question about how it's possible to translate or how it's possible to open it for others. I'm not interested in representation. Instead, I'm interested in creating a temporal system that perhaps offers traces you can connect with. Still, this translation is not in a language where you can say or draw conclusions; it's more about inventing a language with matter, bodies, spaces, words, movement, transition processes, sounds, and relations while trying to translate it in a destabilizing way. For instance, you make a performance, and suddenly this performance meets the public, and the expectations are felt. And this suddenly makes you think about the transformation or how it's translated into a completely different context. And at the same time, you have to be a reader of your own work; you have to stay curious.

FR: I believe that your practice has engaged in criticizing capitalist structures, especially concerning spaces and bodies. Would you agree with this statement?

CB: Yes, because I am aware of a capitalist reduction to functionality and a kind of optimization of processes and bodies, where the non-yet-defined space gets rarer on this planet. The loss of physical territories but also of the territories of imagination and terminologies. When something gets public attention, it's often eaten up, cannibalized, and re-contextualized. And to defend these not yet defined spaces, as physical, mental, political, or artistic spaces, you need a categorization and function, which brings it back to the circle you try to resist: a very ambivalent game or field of politics. The resistance needs to be a practice of insisting on different logics and the existence of liminal spaces.

⁴ Claudia Bosse, *168 Stunden Project*, Vimeo, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://vimeo.com/292075069>.

⁵ Claudia Bosse, *168 Stunden Project*, Theatercombinat, accessed September 15, 2022, http://www.theatercombinat.com/projekte/168stunden/168stunden_en.html.



ORACLE and SACRIFICE in the woods, 2022.
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