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WASTEland—Claudia Bosse's Performative Activation of Haunted Landscapes as an Embodied Form of Planetary Thinking

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Abstract

Gayatri Spivak suggests that we turn our attention to the planet rather than to the globe. While she recognizes the planet in the species of alterity, she considers the globe to be an abstract quantity linked with the desire for control through digital quantification methods. This article discusses Claudia Bosse's choreographic approach of re-imagining the human being as a planetary subject by investigating her dance performance *WASTEland* (2025), which took place on a piece of fallow land near Vienna Central Station. The choreographer turned this wasteland into her artistic laboratory and workplace for seven months. Using a mixed-method approach—combining performance analysis and discourse analysis—and drawing from planetary thinking and new materialism, I analyze Bosse's artistic research, which raises the question of the relationship of precarious landscapes and the precarity of the bodies that perform (on) them, exposed to their climatic and ecological conditions as well as to their uncontrollable inhabitants, both human and other-than-human. How can wasteland and building sites be artistically activated? Does working and dancing on/with wasteland signify a withdrawal from urgent political issues or does this physical exposure enable a shift of perspective in regard to political miseries?

Keywords: dance; choreography; site-specific performance; landscape; planetary thinking; urban transformation; multi-species collaboration; temporality; globality

1. Introduction: The Relationship Between Humans and the Planet as a Subject of Artistic Research

In September 2025, Claudia Bosse's dance performance *WASTEland* took place on a barren land near Vienna Central Station and enabled a new perspective on urban residual spaces and their eeriness. As a choreographer, theatre director, and transdisciplinary artist, Bosse has been based in Vienna since 1999. Since then, her radical performances and interventions in empty buildings, urban spaces, and in theatres have had a major influence on the city's artistic scene.[1] Since 2022, Bosse has directed her attention and research focus towards endangered landscapes such as volcanoes or land altered by underground or open-pit mining. She has experimented with the relationships between bodies, matter, organisms, structures and spaces, weaving them together into new artistic ecologies. The performance *WASTEland* is part of her larger series *haunted landscape/s*, which is dedicated to the investigation of our relationship to the planet and to the exploration of landscapes that bare the marks of human intervention. When Bosse was offered the brownfield site in the center of Vienna, she developed a series of interventions together with her collaborators that were realized on site from August 2024 until September 2024 (entitled *HAUNTED LANDSCAPE on an unseen wasteland*). She translated these site-specific experiences into

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a stage production with the title *HAUNTED LANDSCAPES or the breathing out of Earth* that was presented at Tanzquartier Wien in October 2024. Together with five dancers, Bosse developed recurring site-specific rituals on the barren piece of land from March to September 2025 (*WASTELAND dream/s—a chronicle on choreographic ground*), some of which were recomposed in the performance *WASTEland*, which concludes this series.[2]

In this article, I will examine *WASTEland* as an embodied form of planetary thinking. In 1997, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak pleaded for turning to the planet and explained that the planetary must be thought of as an encounter with species of alterity (Spivak 1999, p. 338). In line with Spivak, Bosse tried to make contact with the other-than-human inhabitants of a piece of wasteland and with those who happened to pass by. According to Jennifer Gabrys, the planetary is "the difference, distance, and duration with, within, and against which it might be possible to think differently about being human and becoming collective" (Gabrys 2018). She speculatively asserts that the planet might "overwrite the globe" and "undo the assumed uniformity of global systems and exchanges" (Gabrys 2018). I will explain why *WASTEland* can be seen as an artistic proposal for overwriting the globe with the planet.

In the following, I will briefly outline the scientific field of planetary thinking. I will then conduct a performance analysis of *WASTEland* focusing on the site-specificity and temporality of this work, and the movements of the dancers who, in my opinion, embody planetary subjects. My performance analysis is informed by rehearsal visits, by watching the performance *WASTEland* on 24 September 2025, and by conducting an interview with the choreographer (together with Maximilian Haas). In the second part of this article, I will examine the philosophical references of the concept of *becoming landscape* and I will argue that an analysis of the performance *WASTEland* is not sufficient to outline the ecological potential of the work. After reflecting on the cultural history of the term 'wasteland', which has been attributed a multitude of meanings, I will analyze the social and ecological potential of *WASTEland* and its relevance in today's political context.

This article is part of the research project *The Becoming Ecological of Artistic Work*, in which Maximilian Haas and I investigate how artistic modes of production and work as well as artistic research in the performing arts transform in the face of current ecological catastrophes and transformations. It examines what embodied forms of thought and action, perceiving and knowing artists invent in dance and performance in order to respond to the current threats to planetary webs of life. The main medium and material of this empirical research are qualitative interviews with artists that have been conducted (between 2023 and 2025) on the basis of their ecologically oriented works, and their situated, sympoietic, or intra-active artistic practices.

2. Site-Responsive Choreography and Performance Dealing with Anthropogenic Landscapes

In the field of choreography and performance many artists have recently worked with, within or in response to landscapes or have experimented with the choreographic concept of *becoming landscape*, including Amanda Piña (*Climatic Dances, School of Mountains and Water*), Eszter Salamon (*Landscaping*), Min Tanaka (the practice *Body Weather*), Eiko Otake (*A Body in Fukushima* as part of *A Body in Places)*, Stefan Kaegi and Caroline Berneaud (*Shared Landscapes*), Stefanie Wenner (*Fermate*), Surjij Nongmeikapam (*Unknown Landscape*), Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereere (*Pleasant Island* and *Out of the Blue*), the collective *Mapped to the Closest Address (Turn off the House Lights)*, Paula Kramer, Gregor Kamnikar (the practice *Bodyscaping*), Fabrice Mazliah (*Embodying Bodies*), Arkadi Zaides (*The Cloud*), and Adam Man (*Reforest*).

The performances of Pina, Otake, Zaides, Man, and Bosse deal with wounded, devastated, destroyed, or barren landscapes which have been transformed by human actions, are more or less contaminated, or bear the scars of extractive practices which are characteristic of petro-capitalism: a system in which "everything has to be product, resource or commodity" as Ailton Krenak put it, referring to Davi Kopenawa Yanomami (Krenak 2020, p. 47).[3] Anthropogenic landscapes are shaped by human activities—often over long periods of time—and usually have consequences for the survival and coexistence of several species, even if this was not intended by the human beings who altered them.

The performance *WASTEland* reveals that landscapes are materializations of the interdependent activities of various species, which Anna Tsing has therefore identified as "products of unintentional design" (Tsing 2015, p. 152). Human activities can be either beneficial or devastating to the flourishing of many species and the ecosystem. But even disturbed, altered, or abandoned places are sites where new forms of life—human and nonhuman—continue to emerge, interact, and adapt (Tsing 2015, pp. 231, 263), as can be seen in the wasteland that Bosse has researched, where wild plants such as grasses, flowers, and thistles grow rampantly and insects live. I argue that *WASTEland* discloses both a utopian and a dystopian dimension in regard to how human activities and movements shape land as well as urban ecologies and vice versa. Kathryn Yusoff has pointed out that the exploitation of a landscape often goes hand in hand with the exploitation of people, one example of which is when slaves were forced to plant monocultures (Yusoff 2019, pp. 14, 24). She thus demonstrated that cultivated or exploited land is intertwined with political agendas or, in some cases, can even be regarded as a material manifestation of political ideologies or economic ideals. Against the backdrop of the disappearance of open and communal spaces as well as multi-species ecologies in large cities, *WASTEland* emerged from research into a barren micro-landscape within the urban context and draws attention to the entanglement of ecologies, construction projects, transformations of urban space, economic and political developments, and activist practices.

3. Planetary Thinking

The aforementioned artists who work with or within landscapes oppose ethnic cultural warriors who associate the earth or soil with homeland and desire to purify it of forms of otherness (Westphal and Kranixfeld 2023–2024). In contrast to this ideology, Spivak has called for a planetary thinking that recognizes the planetary in the species of alterity (Spivak 1999, p. 338). Instead of global agents we should conceive ourselves as planetary subjects, because globalization, she argues, is associated with the digital information network of financialized capitalism and therefore with a space of abstraction characterized by "the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere" (Spivak 1999, p. 338).[4] While capital is located in this space of total abstraction and knows "no other path but toward globalization" (Spivak 1999, p. 345), Spivak thinks that human beings inhabit the planet on loan (Spivak 2003, p. 72), and re-imagining themselves as "planetary accidents" (Spivak 1999, p. 339) rather than as global actors might be helpful in regard to the urgency of becoming aware of a "planetary imperative of responsibility" (Spivak 2003, p. 77). *WASTEland* highlights that approaching a (specific) place means establishing a relationship with species and modes of alterity—deeply situated and radically local. Spivak's thoughts resonate with Bosse's latest performative inventions and her persistence in developing embodied, lived, and attentive relationships with specific landscapes and their peculiar multi-species inhabitants despite their incommensurability. Since Spivak coined the notion of the planetary in a lecture given at the Stiftung Dialogik in Zurich in 1997, planetary thinking has been further developed by a constellation of scientists of various disciplines[5] who are critical of thinking in terms of nation states and rather investigate human life in relation

to a changing planet, thereby going beyond the analysis of a man-made Anthropocene (Hanusch et al. 2021, p. 60). Frederic Hanusch, Claus Leggewie, and Erik Meyer, who founded the *Panel on Planetary Thinking* at the Justus-Liebig-University in Gießen (Germany) in 2020, define relationism and the relativization of an anthropocentric perspective as the two main components of planetary thinking (Hanusch et al. 2021, p. 24), which can clearly be recognized in Bosse's choreographic work since 2022. Her relational choreography *WASTEland* highlights simultaneities, collisions, and entanglements of different bodies—human beings, buildings, meadow, cars, insects—thereby re-positioning the human being, the *anthropos,* that "should be transformed in the context of new social, political, ecological and technological conditions and challenges, and in relation to other existing beings and entities" (Sajewska and Schade 2025). In line with Karen Barad's *Agential Realism*, planetary thinking is developing a variety of metabolic observations of planet–human relationships from various interdisciplinary perspectives based on the assumption that people, animals, plants, technology, and the biosphere emerge from intra-actions and do not possess agency; rather, this capacity arises from those intra-actions (Barad 2007, pp. 210, 214).

4. Colliding Realities, Affective Bonds, and Entangled Temporalities in *WASTEland* (Performance Analysis)

WASTEland premiered on 24 September 2025, and the embodiment of planetary thinking goes hand-in-hand with the question of the transformation of urban ecologies and the loss of public and common spaces. It was performed on a piece of waste ground in the 10th district in Vienna. This barren micro-landscape surrounded by buildings is utterly unspectacular. It is neither a former mining site nor a vast landscape destroyed by radio-activity, but an unsealed area in a concrete jungle, a piece of grassland in the middle of a new development area behind Vienna Central Station. Measuring around 2500 square meters, this wasteland is enclosed by Prizeotel, Hotel Schani, the event center Novum Wien, a new residential and office building, as well as by streets, railway tracks, passing trams, cars, and trains. It seems to be left over from the big construction projects in this area that gave rise to buildings which could be found in any larger city on this planet. (The construction of so-called BahnhofCity accompanied the relocation and reopening of the main station in 2014).

This fallow land that is neither a site of labor nor a site of contemplation, not only served as a performance venue; from March to September 2025, Bosse turned it into her artistic research and workspace. The artistic process largely took place on this unmown meadow, where butterflies and firebugs can be observed as someone dumps their trash. Together with five female-read dancers of different ages (Su Huber, Lucia Mauri, Carla Rihl, Marcela San Pedro, Lena Schattenberg), as well as the dramaturge Krassimira Kruschkova, Bosse explored this wasteland in order to invent embodied and sonical forms of resonance while being exposed to the unpredictable climatic conditions, the behavior of passersby, and the noise pollution on site.

In the performance which presents an assemblage of the artistic experiments and the results of movement research, Bosse makes different bodies, materialities, and realities collide, creating a space of tension. Her artistic work thus comes close to what Gerko Egert has described as "planetary action" in performance art, which he identifies wherever a "network of actions between art, everyday life, and activism" (Egert 2022, p. 111) is woven, characterized by a "nonlinear but highly effective interplay" (p. 112), in which action is not conceived "as an individual act, but as a process of the planet itself" (p. 111)—affecting the Earth as well as being affected by it. Bosse describes her choreographic method as a layering of presences or an overlapping of realities (Bosse et al. 2025). As a spectator, this can clearly be perceived when a dancer is crossing the meadow sideways with heavy, brute steps and a

facial expression of anger and combativeness, her gaze fixed on the buildings to her left, as if she were in conflict with this structure cast in concrete. The dancers' movements alternate between aggressive, desperate, and sensitive, slow movements that are directed outward as if their bodies were listening to the surroundings or transmitting energy (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Responsive movements in Claudia Bosse's choreography *WASTEland* (2025) © Markus Gradwohl.

In the first part, the audience is seated on a tribune installed in the vacant lot. In the second part, the performers take the spectators by the hand and lead them onto the meadow where they can move around freely and have to decide for themselves how close they want to be to the shaking and erupting bodies. In the absence of spotlights, and artificial lighting[6] that would direct their gazes they constantly have to decide on a perspective in a situation in which many movements and viewing directions occur simultaneously (the moving bodies on the meadow, the tram passing by, the man shouting into his cell phone, the woman looking down at the spectators from Hotel Shani, the sky that is darkening, the birds flying by, etc.) (Figure 2). The word "perspective" is not appropriate, as it does not account for the kinesthetic and multi-sensory experience of walking on the meadow while being filmed on a cell phone by a man passing by or of standing on the muddy ground in the rain, freezing at dusk. Throughout the performance, the feeling of unease and discomfort is maintained.

The wasteland becomes the scene of poetic rituals, movements of becoming insects, figures conversing with plants in unknown languages with facial expressions full of pain and despair—as if they were mourning the condition of the living entities on this wasteland or what the *Capitalocene* (Moore 2016) has transformed their habitat into—not unlike dancer Eiko Otake's method of "embodying the apocalyptic landscape's pain" (Yoshida 2025, p. 365) in her multi-dimensional work *A Body in Fukushima*. In the performance *WASTEland*, the micro-landscape near Vienna Central Station is "haunted by imagined futures" (Tsing

et al. 2017, p. G2); the loss of species diversity and the vision of a future of care for multi-species life and urban spaces without predefined or commercial use.



Figure 2. The dancers Su Huber, Lucia Mauri, Carla Rihl, Marcela San Pedro, and Lena Schattenberg on the wasteland near Vienna Central Station © Markus Gradwohl.

Involved in intra-actions with materializations of past futures (stones, thistles, wild grasses, cars, etc.) the dancers who are wearing jean overalls and black fishing boots perform jerky and abrupt movements. They are firmly rooted in the meadow, and yet are in conflict with the site. When the spectators also populate and traverse the meadow, the dancers pick up stones or chunks of asphalt from the muddy ground and explain their (hi)stories to small groups of spectators who are invited to touch these material remnants of vanished practices and constructions.

"The present is the future of the past" is reiterated by the female performers who form a speaking choir in the last scene. It is the only sentence uttered in this performance that otherwise unfolds in the soundscape of the city, sometimes overlaid with minimal electronic sounds composed by Günther Auer. Which past ways of life (human and nonhuman) haunt this place? Towards the end of the performance, I look back at the empty grandstand from a distance. It suddenly seems like a skeleton to me, like a relic from a bygone era. I remember the theatrical beginning of the performance when the spectators were still sitting on the tribune and the dancers stood in front of them addressing them with their gaze, and then formed a human chain, each touching the breast of the dancer on her right and on her left (Figure 3). In this configuration, they slowly walked backwards, and the image of a strange female collective gradually transformed into what appeared to me like a moving octopus. Eventually, the chain of bodies broke up and the dancers were lying down on the meadow, *becoming* (small hills in the) *landscape*.



Figure 3. The dancers in the first scene of the performance *WASTEland* (2025), slowly moving away from the audience © Markus Gradwohl.

5. Becoming Landscape (Conceptual References)

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have outlined the process of becoming as a line of flight from modes of imitation and relations of resemblance (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, p. 237). As a process of metamorphosis, *becoming*, according to them, is made possible by entering an alliance with entities and intensities of heterogenous scales and species (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, p. 238). The *becoming landscape* of the dancing bodies in Bosse's recent choreographic research and in *WASTEland* is transversal to human identifications. By forming an alliance with a meadow in the city, contagion is possible, leading to a destabilization of preconceived and recognizable identities (both in regard to the meadow and the human bodies). The dancers form a block of becoming (body and landscape), while being permeated by affects and intensities.

We find an echo of this idea in Ailton Krenak's plea for the creation of affective bonds with human life forms as well as with those beyond the human realm (Krenak 2024), and "as we make affective bonds, so too do those bonds remake us" (Krenak 2024, p. xvi). Krenak is a socio-environmental activist, philosopher, and indigenous leader who lives in a landscape along the Doce River in Brazil that was devastated by mining projects. In the language of the Krenak people (Borun), which belongs to the Macro-Jê language family in Brazil, the word "Krenak" is itself the expression of an alliance of a human being and a land (*kre* meaning "head" and *nak* meaning "land") (Krenak 2020, p. 49). Krenak points out this etymology to emphasize the deep connection of the Krenak people with the land or ground.[7] In what Europeans call landscape, Krenak perceives our ancestors. "[. . .] If there is a future to imagine", he writes, "it is ancestral, because it is already present" (Krenak 2024, p. 1). Rivers, mountains, and meadows have experienced different times and, according to Krenak, are beings which are entangled with human forms of life. This stands in contrast to

the linear conception of temporality implicit in ideas of progress and accumulation. Krenak is awaiting a temporality of being in constellation with forms of life beyond the human.

The conceptual figuration of *becoming landscape* can also be found in Heiner Müller's writings where it was related to a *becoming collective* (Christof 2021, p. 316), which reverberates in the choreographic practice of Bosse. "At some point one dies and becomes landscape", Müller wrote (Müller 2008, p. 150). A *becoming landscape* stands in contrast to the long Western art-historical tradition of objectifying the landscape, that reduced the latter to a visual object (usually purified of human intervention) for a human observer and thereby affirmed the modern, dualistic way of thinking that assumed a split between the enlightened human subject (usually male) that emancipated itself from the world/from nature, which was conceived as a passive object to be conquered, occupied, cultivated, exploited, and capitalized.

6. Wasteland as Cultural Construct and Material Reality

According to Vittoria di Palma, wasteland is "a landscape that resists notions of proper or appropriate use" (Di Palma 2014, p. 3). In her detailed and comprehensive study on the history of wasteland, she shows that, historically speaking, both landscapes devoid of human intervention (such as deserts and ice caps) as well as landscapes transformed, devastated, or abandoned by human beings (such as former military bases or mines) were referred to as "wasteland" (Di Palma 2014, p. 3). The term was first used at the beginning of the 13th century, whereas previously the English word "western" (meaning devastated, wild or uninhabited land) had been common (Di Palma 2014, p. 3). Di Palma argues that

> the wasteland is a place, but even more it is a category of land, a category united not by consistent physical qualities—whether topographical or ecological—but, rather, by their absence. The wasteland is defined not by what it is or what it has, but by what it lacks: it has no water, food, or people, no cities, buildings, settlements, or farms. The emptiness that is the core characteristic of the wasteland is also what gives the term its malleability, its potential for abstraction; a vacant shell, it lies ready to include all those kinds of places that are denied in negative terms, identified primarily by what they are not (Di Palma 2014, p. 3).[8]

This thesis is confirmed by Bosse's explanation of her concept of landscape as a place where, unlike a field, no yield needs to be produced, and which therefore does not serve the purpose of generating profit, as she explained in her lecture "Unsichere Landschaften".[9] This definition applies equally to landscape and wasteland, and reveals the choreographer's attempt to detach landscape from references to the pastoral and picturesque as it was characteristic for Romanticism. Bosse's definition is the antithesis of John Locke's understanding of wasteland, which he propagated in the 17th century and according to which wasteland was unproductive land that had to be made productive through privatization and cultivation (Di Palma 2014, p. 39).

Historical and cultural differences in the definition of wasteland confirm Di Palma's assertion that the term "wasteland" is a cultural construct or imagination (Di Palma 2014, p. 9). In Bosse's work, this cultural construct serves as a negative foil to obsolete landscape ideals, and it hints at the ambiguity of this specific micro-landscape at Vienna Central Station, which is embedded in the urban landscape: the performance *WASTEland* takes place in an apparently public space that is actually owned by Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB), a state-owned stock corporation (ÖBB-Holding AG). It is dystopian (because it is not beautiful or inviting, has low biodiversity in a sealed and noisy urban environment, and could be seen as an allegory for dying or displaced ecosystems) and utopian (it is a piece of undeveloped land that does not impose specific forms of movement, and which provides a

habitat for animals and plants. As such, it can be seen as a remnant of multi-species life that has escaped the sanitization and beautification of city centers). It is land where no yield needs to be produced and that allows for relationships and intra-actions with species of alterity. This description stands in stark contrast to the Enlightenment's drive to make fallow land productive and to consider it as waste if it was unused, unusable, or improperly used (for example, communally) (Di Palma 2014, p. 43). As Di Palma shows, Francis Bacon and John Locke contributed significantly to establishing the ideal of productivity and use-value, which later also led to the expansion of cultivated (monoculture-)landscapes. While before, the notions "common" and "waste" had often appeared interchangeably (Di Palma 2014, p. 25), and the word "wasteland" had been linked to the notion of common land in Britain, Locke advocated for a new political economy and the value of private property, with the concept of wasteland being central to his argument (Di Palma 2014, p. 39). Di Palma concludes that while others (for example Winstanley and the Diggers) recognized wasteland as the true commons, for Locke "wasteland was not merely land that had not yet been improved, but was in fact understood as land that was in need of—and even calling out for—improvement" (Di Palma 2014, p. 39), a reasoning that also helped to justify colonialism and enclosure. With Locke, wasteland became synonymous with unproductive land that had to be made productive by being privatized and improved, otherwise it would be wasted.

In his second treatise Locke writes:

> God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit, and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational, (and labour was to be his title to it;) not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious (Locke 1988, II, §34).

This perception was reversed in the 18th and early 19th centuries, when cultivated and industrially exploited landscapes were regarded as destroyed or polluted nature called wasteland, while "wilderness" was regarded as pristine nature that corresponded to the picturesque ideal of a beautiful landscape. The meaning of wasteland as a cultural construct significantly changed in different historical periods: once considered to be the opposite of civilization, it became land that had no use-value and therefore had to be cultivated before it eventually became land profoundly shaped, transformed or destroyed by humans (Di Palma 2014, p. 43). In the *Capitalocene*, wasteland that has not been inhabited, used, or exploited by humans for some time is often becoming a refuge for rare bird, plant, and other animal species (Di Palma 2014, p. 2), which leads to a high level of biodiversity. This can be seen in the case of Krater, an abandoned landscape which is populated by invasive and other feral species (Figure 4).

Krater is an 18,000 square meter plot of land in the center of Ljubljana owned by the Slovenian Ministry of Justice. The latter planned to build a Palace of Justice there, a project that was never realized. As a result, this wasteland, a former military site where gravel was once mined (hence the name Krater which means crater) fell into oblivion, was fenced off and remained unused for 28 years. During this time, numerous nonhuman species reclaimed this land, grew and settled in this place, among them, invasive species—resulting in a high level of biodiversity unusual in urban contexts. "However, unregulated plots of urban nature are commonly perceived as a problem to be repaired, an anomaly that needs to be annulled by injecting a predefined program and regulating ownership structures. Administrative frameworks fail to recognize the site's biodiversity and soil quality improvement, while the media sees it as a threat to a fairly regulated city and a burden to its inhabitants" (Sretenović and Osole 2022). In agreement with the Ministry of

Justice (which is aiming to build the new Palace of Justice soon), Krater is now proclaimed and being used as a co-production space by Krater Collective/the cultural organization Trajna, an interdisciplinary group of designers, manufacturers, architects, and ecologists. In their self-description, they write: "Krater invites us to reimagine wastelands as spontaneous gardens of human–plant companionships working towards building more interconnected futures".[10] Architect and curator Danica Sretenović and eco-social designer and inventor Gaja Mežnarić Osole, a founding member of Krater Collective, curated *The Feral Palace*, a program that speculatively asked what a multispecies inclusive Palace of Justice would look like. Together they also initiated and lead *The School of Feral Grounds*.



Figure 4. Krater, a production laboratory for transdisciplinary practices at a neglected construction site in Ljubljana © Amadeja Smrekar.

The barren land at Vienna Central Station, to which Bosse and her collaborators returned repeatedly over a long period of time, is anything but a beautiful landscape, and the performance *WASTEland* highlights the eeriness of this place, which points at the "twenty-first-century remaking of urban centers into slickly surveilled and partitioned hubs of global finance" (Gissen 2015, p. 363) that, according to David Gissen has brought forth "new ways of contesting those very networks of money and power" (ibid.). Gissen states that today "the detritus of contemporary urbanization offers the material with which to pose another world" (ibid.). He is interested in urban practices that "do not just propose new forms of political action but are themselves transformations of the city and can be regarded as materializations of 'political will' in the urban landscape" (2015, p. 363). He calls them 'protest landscapes' and believes that they are not only forms of protest, but also forms of pollution of elegant city centers. His concept of the 'protest landscape' echoes Krenak's question of how it is possible to "contest the privatization and sanitization of urban spheres that capitalize on cloistering", as Alex Brostoff and Jamille Pinheiro Dias have formulated it (Krenak 2024, p. xii). Invited by the performers to join them on the wasteland, the spectators inevitably get their shoes dirty. They will carry the dirt into the trains, trams, and subways that they will use after the performance. Bosse's artistic intervention disrupts the normative order of movement in this urban surrounding marked by transport routes—the arteries of global societies which assign the body a place at the

center of a network of power relations consisting of timetables, navigation technology, digital payment systems, algorithms, security measures, and surveillance technologies. The surrounding of the wasteland represents a score for appropriate routes and forms of movement. In contrast to the linear pathways embodied by roads and rails, the movements of the performers are simultaneously intertwined with what was and what is not yet. They hint at a temporality that breaks away from the linear conception of time as a sequence of successive mo(ve)ments (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Desperate and jerky movements in the performance *WASTEland* (2025) © Markus Gradwohl.

7. Landscape Dramaturgy and the Interruption of Circulationism

In an essay written in 2017, the performance theorist Ana Vujanović proposed the concept of *landscape dramaturgy* that she defines as follows: "Where dramaturgy resonates with its surrounding context and at the same time invites us to reflect on this context when viewing a performance, I recognize a trend in the contemporary European dance and performance scene that I would like to describe as landscape dramaturgy"[11] (Vujanović 2020, p. 27). According to her, this form of dramaturgy is characteristic for performances such as *Boom Bodies* (2016) by Doris Uhlich, *Natten* (2016) and *The Internet* (2015) by Mårten Spångberg, *Groove Space* (2014–2016) by Sebastian Matthias, and other performances, all of which took place in the theatre. In these works, the "dramaturgical problem of temporality" becomes, in her opinion, "a question of visual composition in which one loses oneself" (Vujanović 2020, p. 35). Vujanović considers this experience of time, in which past, present and future blur, comparable to the experience of browsing the Internet. This form of *landscape dramaturgy* leaves it open to viewers to decide what forms of (in)attention they apply in their reception—often by multiplying perspectives on the performance, placing performers and viewers in the same space. Vujanović observes that the performances mentioned form a surface on which events take place and disappear without leading

anywhere particular, which corresponds to the visual logic of surfing the Internet (Vujanović 2020, p. 35).

Even if a multiplication of perspectives as described by Vujanović is also characteristic for *WASTEland*—especially in the second part, in which the spectators move freely on the wasteland and position themselves in relation to the dancers and the passers-by and the performance *WASTEland* does also emphasize the entanglement of past, present, and future, which, according to Vujanović, is typical of *landscape dramaturgy*, *WASTEland* does *not* convey the sense of arbitrariness that characterizes the Internet, with its indifferent offering of seemingly equivalent textual interfaces that blur the difference between temporal contexts in an illusion of eternal immediacy. Internet-culture is connected with what Hito Steyerl has called *circulationism* (Steyerl 2017, pp. 150–51) when referring to the journey and acceleration of images, words, or traces of events on social networks and in digital channels. While in the Soviet avant-garde, art should enter production and the factory, Steyerl claims that in our digitally mediated era, it is not about the production of images but about their postproduction, circulation, and acceleration (2017, p. 150). Today, the question arises how images and visualization technology contribute to shaping or extinguishing bodies, landscapes, and social or political systems.

As a movement paradigm, *circulationism* is not only significant for the movement of images in the digital era but also for the movement of goods, certain (privileged) bodies, and certain artistic products in globalized capitalism that are always already linked to the circulation of images off- and online. Performances have to circulate in as many art and academic institutions as possible in order to gain currency. And of course, they have to set in motion an array of images that circulate online.

I propose that while *circulationism* (Steyerl) is constitutive of globalization, lingering in a specific place (meaning returning to it again and again and interweaving oneself with it), which is at the core of Bosse's choreographic method, is constitutive of planetary thinking. Bosse's artistic approach in *WASTEland* is diametrically opposed to *circulationism*. The performance is site-responsive to such an extent that it cannot be shown in another location without becoming a completely different performance. Bosse's aim to intra-act with all the beings of alterity who visit or inhabit the site can clearly be seen in regard to the signs that she installed on both sides of the brownfield in the beginning of the process. They say: "*WASTEland dream/s*, a monthly recurring artistic exploration of the abandoned site and its diverse inhabitants—plants, wild herbs, grasses, and insects." The text ends with an attempt to make contact: "Would you like to get involved? Write us." This call is followed by the email address of theatercombinat. But an aesthetic analysis of the performance *WASTEland* does not do justice to the critical potential of this work that is also to be found in its infrastructural and temporal dimension as well as in an altered self-understanding of the choreographer. *WASTEland* cannot circulate easily in the institutional channels of the art market. The performance is characterized by an extended production dramaturgy that exceeds the temporality of a conventional artistic project. The series *haunted landscape/s*, of which it is a part, is itself part of the four-year-long cycle of works with the title *Organ/ism—poetics of relations* (2022–2025). *WASTEland* marks the end of this cycle and could be regarded as a form of composting site-responsive movements in a performance that could serve as humus for future practices (of embodiment) and forms of more-than-human sociality. Bosse breaks with the usual temporal horizon of an artistic project and thereby undermines the short rehearsal phases which are the norm in project-based, artistic work contexts. Even if the performance was embedded in the program of Tanzquartier Wien, the choreographer left the art institution that guarantees visibility and social validation of the work. This raises the question of how the precariousness of this wasteland relates to the precarity of the

persons that choreographed and performed (in and with) it, exposed to the unpredictable climatic conditions and intra-actions on site.

However critically art may be experienced, production systems in this field often remain unchanged. Tery Žeželj has pointed out that "merely including more-than-humans as agential in the already established system is not enough" and that "instead, a transformation of the system in which they are included is crucial" (Žeželj 2022, p. 75). Bojana Kunst has emphasized that it is precisely the emotional commitment involved in the art field that frequently leads to accelerated project timelines and precarity (Kunst 2023, p. 203). Extractivist working methods also exist within the field of art. Thus, this field (including funding structures, institutions, and infrastructure) partially contributes to the "crisis of the sustainability of life" (Kunst 2023, p. 191). Kunst therefore asks: "Can we think of art spaces [. . .] that no longer feed value back into individuals and individual institutions, but into entire ecosystems of co-existence?" (2023, p. 237). As she has shown, this would mean that the way art is produced and shared, that the institutions and the forms of coming together would also have to change. The embedding of *WASTEland* in long-term artistic research, leaving the institution (in the production process as well as a performance venue), the invention of unconventional forms of encounter, and a more than human dramaturgy are Bosse's and Kruschkova's contributions to such a re-thinking of the prevailing conditions of production within the field of art.

Bosse is also deviating from a conception of authorship that was characteristic of choreographers at the end of the 20th century. As a choreographer she is responsible for the basic structure of the performance, but rather than a creator of movements she is activating, moderating, assembling and relating embodied responses to the landscape and its context in close collaboration with the female dancers and the dramaturge. Her practice of opening up and connecting to a place and its human and other-than-human inhabitants generates feminist ecological potentials. This also signifies a break with the self-referentiality of many choreographic works in the 1990s, when many choreographers identified with authors.

8. Conclusions

The site-specific performance *WASTEland* is an assemblage of choreographed movement responses to a specific landscape and actions that happen to occur in this landscape beyond the choreographer's control. The focus is not on "individual actions and their (un)repeatability" (Egert 2022, p. 111), rather, the performance invites the spectators to let their gaze wander: from the dancers to the landscape, to the passers-by, and to the surrounding cityscape, before the spectators are invited to enter the wasteland themselves, thereby losing the overview and their distance from the performed movements and actions or gaining a situated perspective that depends on their own decisions. The more-than-human dramaturgy of the performance creates "an ecology of non-linear relations", which, as Gerko Egert has pointed out, is significant for a "planetary politics of action" (Egert 2022, p. 111). In *WASTEland*, the layering of movements and events never dissolves into harmonious interplay; rather, the performance emphasizes difference, rupture, clashes, and conflict. It allows for perceiving the urban residual space near Vienna Central Station as eerie—haunted both by past practices and possible futures. In its ambiguity between private and public space, as well as between dystopia (dying ecologies) and utopia (alternative and sustainable way of being together in multi-species environments), the wasteland does not merely serve as a performance venue but as a subject of investigation and as a research laboratory. During the Enlightenment, wasteland became synonymous with unproductive land that should be rescued from its worthlessness through privatization and cultivation. In contrast, Bosse's interest in this wasteland as a heterotopia lies in the fact that it does not

need to produce any yield and has been left out of the construction projects in this area, becoming a habitat for various species.

As an embodied form of planetary thinking, the performance is free from moral judgments, educational zeal, or well-intentioned activism—driven by the intention to compose, dance, and choreograph *with* and not just *in* a specific landscape while simultaneously maintaining a conflictual relation with it—thus generating the feeling of unease. In the context of the climate catastrophe and the mass extinction of species, as well as in regard to the loss of communal spaces and activities in urban contexts that would be free of commercial interest, *WASTEland* is an important contribution to rethinking the planet and to re-imagining its temporary human inhabitants as planetary subjects. In reference to the emerging transdisciplinary science of planetary thinking, I have shown that the planetary in Bosse's work is not an assumed undivided, natural space or totality but a differentiated, situated, and political cultivation of relationships with human and other-than-human forms of life. This echoes Spivak's planetary ethics and her suggestion to re-imagine the planet by engaging in situated encounters with species of alterity. For Spivak, the planetary is a political perspective. Since her lecture in 1997, the come-back of imperialist politics is contributing to demolishing planetary perspectives. I have shown that Bosse's artistic proposal to overwrite the global (as a space of abstraction or constellation of pixels and circulation of data) with the planetary is inevitably connected with abandoning a detached spectator perspective that suggests an overview (which is linked to ideas of manageability). In Spivak's philosophy and in Bosse's artistic work, the planetary is distinct from "the Earth of earth sciences, the globe of capitalism, or the human of *homo economicus*" (Gabrys 2018).

Examining the critical dimension of the work demands a consideration of the whole production process and the entanglement of aesthetics with methods, institutions, and infrastructures. Considering *WASTEland* in the context of Bosse's larger series *haunted landscape/s* (2022–2025) and pointing at the choreographic method of *becoming landscape* has allowed me to demonstrate that the ecological and political potential of *WASTEland* is also to be found in its institutional critique and the long-term commitment to building relationships on site. What does a planetary perspective in the arts contribute to politics? While I do not share Katharina Block and Manfred Lenzen's view that a planetary perspective in science is the capability to see the Earth as a whole, a capacity that, as they emphasize, resulted from decades of interdisciplinary collaboration across national borders (Block and Lenzen 2025) and that is certainly very important for climate research, I do agree with their warning that the loss of a planetary perspective would not just mean the loss of a worldview, but also the loss of a "horizon for action" (Block and Lenzen 2025).

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Data Availability Statement: The data (interview) mentioned in this study is not publicly available yet. The interview is scheduled to be published as part of a book by Martina Ruhsam and Maximilian Haas in 2026. It may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Notes

1 A comprehensive presentation of the entire body of work of Claudia Bosse can be found in the publication *Kein Theater. Alles möglich* (Baum and Tiedemann 2023). In addition, the artist's website provides a good overview of Claudia Bosse's artistic work.

2 Nigel Stewart (2010) argues that dance enables an embodied engagement with place. He proposes the term "environmental dance" to describe dance and somatic practices that explore the relationship between the human body and a landscape or environment, including non-human bodies such as animals or plants. Stuart distinguishes between three types of practices: site-specific dance works, dance theater works for the stage that convey environmental or site-specific aspects, and somatic education and movement research outside of studio settings. Bosse's artistic work with landscapes encompasses all three practices. Important scholars who wrote about the planetary dimension of site-specific dance practices include Kwon (2002), Hunter (2015), Edensor and Bowdler (2015), Barbour et al. (2019), and Hunter (2021).

3 That is the key difference between these recent site-specific dances and choreographies and historical dance performances that took place outdoors. In the context of European dance history, significant dance works performed outdoors included Rudolf Laban's movement choirs (in the 1920s) and Isadora Duncan's performances, in which she danced barefoot in open landscapes such as those of the Mediterranean. Mary Wigman's work was occasionally performed outdoors as part of certain festivals. These choreographers connected movement with nature and sought to unite with it (even in indoor productions such as Wigman's *Swinging Landscapes*, in which the dancers portray blooming flowers). In German Expressionist dance, the rural landscape was understood as the antithesis of industrial landscapes and, like unrestricted movement, was revered for its authenticity. Dancing in the landscape was intended to establish a connection with nature and express that connection, with "nature" here understood as a concept associated with beauty, primal simplicity, freedom of movement, and free expression. The landscape was also an important metaphor for viewing the body as a landscape of the soul, which these choreographers sought to express.
In the 1960s and 70s, Lucinda Childs (*Street Dance*), Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, and Anna Halprin were choreographers who developed and presented site-specific dances in the United States. While some of Cunningham's performances took place in parks or city squares, Brown used the urban infrastructure as a movement score (*Rooftop Piece*, *Walking down the Side of a Building*), and Halprin choreographed numerous community performances outdoors in California's landscapes. In her work, movement is already viewed as the result of an interplay between the dancers and the rural landscape, and nature is regarded as co-creator of the performances.
Halprin, whose husband was a landscape architect, initiated the "Planetary Dance" in the early 1980s. Initially, it was a ritual dance intended to heal and reclaim Mt. Tamalpais, where six women had been murdered between 1979 and 1981. Since then, the "Planetary Dance" has been realized every year at Mt. Tamalpais. Furthermore, it has been practiced in 46 different countries ever since. "Planetary Dance" is a participatory event in which everyone involved embodies a moving mandala by walking and dancing in several circles; it is an offer to take part in communal dances and embodied rituals. In contrast to Bosse's performance *WASTEland*, which emphasizes an eerie atmosphere and a certain tension between the performers and the site on which they perform, Halprin's "Planetary Dance" is rooted in the intention to promote healing and peace, both among people and with the Earth (Halprin and Rachel 2019).

4 On the concept of the planet/planetary as an alternative to the globe/global, see also Chakrabarty (2021).

5 Proponents of planetary thinking are, among others, Marisol de la Cadena, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Paul Jozef Crutzen, Will Steffen, Joel Davis, Etienne Turpin, Christoph Asendorf, Kristin Bergmann, Claus Leggewie, Frederic Hanusch, Erik Meyer.

6 Only towards the end of the performance, when it is becoming dark, do the dancers wear headlamps.

7 In most Indigenous dance practices, dance is inseparable from land or a land-specific relational practice. Indigenous ceremonies that include dance mostly express a deep connection to a specific land, whereby the land(scape) is not viewed as a stage or backdrop for the movements of human bodies. Rather, it is seen as active and as manifesting the ongoing presence of the ancestors. Indigenous dance practices challenge the notion of neutral space and explore or express the complex interrelationships between land, the ancestors (ancestral knowledge), the body, and the community. Examples include dances connected to the Songlines of the Aboriginal people in Australia (Somerville et al. 2019), Tiwi dance in Australia (Grau 2005), or Wixarika dance and ritual practices in the Amerindian context, in which "people acquire a different body, a different face, partially transforming to allow ancestors and the more-than-human forces to inhabit them and become present through dance, song and ritual" (Piña 2025).

8 An artistic work set in a different historical context that brings to the forefront useless and invisible spaces in the urban landscape is Gordon Matta-Clark's *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* (1973).

[9] Bosse has outlined this definition in her lecture "Unsichere Landschaften" ("Precarious landscapes") that she gave on 7 February 2025 in the context of the artistic-scientific symposium *Plus d'un theatre. Potentialitäten eines eingreifenden Denkens.* The symposium took place in Frankfurt a. M.

[10] Cf. the website of Krater: www.krater.si (accessed on 19 February 2026).

[11] Translation by the author of the article.

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