

PERFORMATIVITY OF SOCIO-POLITICAL DOUBLE BINDS¹

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14712/2571452X.2025.70.2>

Abstract: The article focuses on the communicative situation of the socio-political double bind that generates politics of impasse. This is located outside the performativity of both agonism and deliberation. The impasse is neither a state of conflict nor of an agreement. Rather, it represents a state of inertia, whereby the amplification of socio-political forces causes them to weaken. Two cases of artistic research focusing on the performativity of the double-bind are presented. The *Strachy* (Fears) project explored the theme of art as a space that openly criticises social power relations, while being simultaneously dominated by the same types of power. The second project, *Propojme se včera* (Let's Connect Yesterday), explored social rigidity in the face of a growing global polycrisis, of which society itself is the main instigator. Through artistic research, we explored whether it is possible to reverse communication based on self-destructive implosion and transform it into self-transgressing communication, making the invisible aspects of these social phenomena visible. The aim was not to 'shoot the problem' or escape it through art. Instead, we sought a performative reframing of the impasse that would transform the double bind into an affirmative and agonistic participation in social reality, with the potential to bring about social change.

Keywords: performativity, double bind, theatre of impasse, artistic research, polycrisis, metacommunication

Introduction

Both agonism and deliberative theory focus on a detailed analysis of the principles and forces that set socio-political dynamics in motion. Whether the principle of political development is the irrevocable conflict between social groups or,

¹ This work was created as part of the NPO project "SYRI National Institute for Research on the Socioeconomic Impacts of Diseases and Systemic Risks," No. LX22NPO5101, funded by the European Union – Next Generation EU (MŠMT, NPO: EXCELES).

conversely, the search for social agreement, these are always principles that are dynamic and related to the values of democracy. This article, on the other hand, focuses on a socio-political phenomenon that escapes both perspectives. With reference to the work of Gregory Bateson, I call this phenomenon the “double bind.”² Bateson presents the double bind as a result of a set of communicative acts that has the potential to induce a schizophrenic experience in individuals caught in its trap. I believe that a similar pattern can be found at the level of social performativity in the form of sets of communicative acts that induce the denial of affirmation in the social system, thereby generating what we might call the politics of impasse.

British art theorist and theatre scholar Tony Fisher explicitly addresses the theme of politics of impasse and its connection to theatricality in several texts.³ At the same time, he develops the theme of the political exception of theatre.⁴ Fisher finds this exception in a certain form of interruption of the necessity to decide whether theatre is identical with the political or fundamentally different from it. Theatre is often political in that it is not explicitly political. It contributes to the creation of a space in which it is possible to make political decisions, rather than merely replicating the political. The conceptual pair of double bind and exception offers to understand theatre as political communication of communication in two ways: once as system of political implosion (communication denying itself) and once as a system of political reframing the position of unbearable hopelessness (communication transcending itself). This insight resonates with the system approaches to polycrisis, as introduced by French systems theorist and philosopher Edgar Morin and others.⁵

I will examine these two communicative phenomena not only theoretically, but also through two artistic research projects that I carried out in collaboration with the Tantehorse theatre company. The starting point for each of these projects is a different singular form of double bind. In the project *Strachy* (Fears), we explored the theme of art as a space that openly criticises social power relations

² Gregory Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley, and John Weakland, “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia,” *Behavioural Science* 1, no. 4 (1956): 251-64.

³ Tony Fisher, “Theatre at the Impasse: Political Theology and Blitz Theatre Group’s *Late Night*,” *Performance Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2018): 139-56. See also Alice Koubová and Tony Fisher, “Aesthetic Exception within the Politics of the Impasse,” *Arte Acta* 11, no. 1 (2024): 47-66.

⁴ Tony Fisher, *The Aesthetic Exception: Essays on Art, Theatre and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

⁵ For the first mention of the term, see Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern, *Homeland Earth: A Manifesto for a New Millennium* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1999), 74.

and at the same time is ruled and determined by the same types of power relations. The second project, entitled *Propojme se včera* (Let's Connect Yesterday), focused on social rigidity in the face of a growing global polycrisis, the main architect of which is society itself. In both cases, we are dealing with a situation where neither agonistic nor deliberative principles apply. The aim was to trace the very principle of the impasse and make it visible performatively together with its potential reframing.

Double Bind and the Theatre of Impasse

In their communication theory, Gregory Bateson and his co-authors describe the relationship between the context of a communication situation and what is expressed through communication.⁶ They point to the existence of a sequence of communication interactions that induce the symptomatology of schizophrenic experience of the world. They call this communication situation the “double bind.”

The rules of these communication acts are as follows:

1. Two or more people participate in the communication situation, one of whom plays the role of the “victim.”
2. A double bind is a situation to which the victim is exposed so repeatedly and for so long that it becomes an embodied habit.
3. The victim is exposed to the first negative command: if you do not do this, I will punish you.
4. It is at the same time exposed to the secondary communication denying the first negative command: do not take this as a command; do not obey my commands; you must not perceive this as punishment; you must not perceive me as a punishing person; do not doubt my love on the basis of this command.
5. The victim is prohibited from leaving the communication field and “is unable to [...] make a metacommunicative statement.”⁷
6. Once the double bind pattern is imprinted on the victim, it is not necessary to reinforce it further. Any part of the communication sequence provokes a schizophrenic experience, including the victim's internal communication divided into multiple internal voices.

At the level of the social system, the double bind can be described as cultural communication that emphasises the importance of a specific value (e.g., what constitutes success in life, the value of human existence, health), but whose

⁶ Bateson et al., “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia,” 251-64.

⁷ Bateson et al., “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia,” 252.

reinforcement leads to the destruction of that same value (bringing failure in life, a feeling of meaninglessness, illness). Thus, if a culture communicates a principle whose fulfilment destroys that principle, a person becomes a victim of a socio-cultural double bind. What should lead to prosperity is also a source of suffering; there is no escape from the situation, and this state is long-term and unnamed. Such a communicative situation has a destructive impact on the individual's ability to act or understand reality. Life in a double bind becomes unlivable, literally, not metaphorically.

An example of a social double bind is the modern promise of endless progress and prosperity, which, as sociologist Andreas Reckwitz points out, ends in an unprecedented experience of failure:

Loss is everywhere. Present-day, late-modern societies in the West are confronted with collective experiences of loss to an unprecedented degree. This raises a fundamental challenge, because modern society since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment has thrived on a big promise – the promise of progress. However, experiences of loss contradict this promise.⁸

The double bind of progress has its counterpart at the level of individual striving for a “better version of oneself”: “Even though people have a good quality of life, they are not happy because they want to ‘create a better version’ of themselves. [...] We improve ourselves to self-hatred and death.”⁹ And systems theorist Edgar Morin captures the double bind situation in the field of ecology: “Humanity has become its own worst enemy. [...] We have set a global trend that is pushing us towards general regression and catastrophe.”¹⁰

The promotion of a value that denies itself brings the dynamics of the socio-political system to a state that can be described as impasse. Tony Fisher uses the concept to characterise a “state that definitively ends the fetish of man's domination over the world, over his own destiny, through his political domination over himself.”¹¹ An impasse is not merely a crisis. A crisis tests human intentions, willpower, and conflicting power ambitions. In a crisis, people are exposed to uncertainty, pressures, problems, or conflicts in which they are forced to make decisions. The characteristic of an impasse, on the other hand, is that any decision

⁸ Andreas Reckwitz, “The Challenge of Loss,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 10 January 2023, accessed 5 May 2025, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/short-takes/the-challenge-of-loss/>.

⁹ Mark Coeckelbergh, *Self-Improvement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 1-2.

¹⁰ Edgar Morin, “Uniting the Best of Africa and the West [Interview],” *New African*, 17 January 2022, accessed 5 May 2025, <https://newafricanmagazine.com/27616/>.

¹¹ Fisher, “Theatre at the Impasse,” 139.

made in it is dysfunctional and leads nowhere. An impasse is a space without orientation and without power, where everything moves and at the same time does not move, where intention and effort do not allow one to break through anywhere. In an impasse, therefore, faith in will and human sovereignty loses its effectiveness. What is fully applied here, on the contrary, is helplessness. Nevertheless, staying in an impasse somehow unfolds over time. It continues as the impossibility of continuing somewhere, towards something, in the name of something. Fisher argues that even if helplessness cannot be overcome in terms of time and meaning, it can be “endured or withstood if one is resilient enough.”¹²

The political impasse is also reflected in contemporary theatre, which, at least since its post-dramatic phase, has ceased to believe that it could be powerful enough to help decide anything in the world through its actions. It is becoming theatre without political intent, losing its aesthetic sovereignty, and its oscillation between aesthetic exceptionality and political importance ends in a feeling of futility and emptiness. However, according to Fisher, this is only one way of approaching the dead-end situation from the perspective of theatre production. We could call this state of affairs communication of communication leading to a schizophrenic implosion into itself. The problem with this approach is that it essentially replicates the symptoms of political impasse and does not create a gesture that would be metacommunicative and thus have transformative power. I claim artistic research as an art form that leans so far towards science that it is no longer purely art, but is not yet science. It is precisely from this position that it responds most relevantly to the impasse and presents the performativity of theatrical exception.

Before interpreting artistic research projects, however, it is necessary to explain the situation of polycrisis.

Polycrisis and Double Binds

In 1999, French philosopher and systems theorist Edgar Morin first used the term *polycrisis* to suggest that humanity is not facing a single crisis, but rather a combination of social, health, geopolitical and environmental upheavals that have no common denominator. According to Morin, polycrisis forces humanity to respond on many levels simultaneously, and in order to solve the problems, it would have to respond very quickly, inventively and at the same time with an awareness of the unknowable nature of the complex problems it faces:

¹² Fisher, “Theatre at the Impasse,” 140.

It is difficult to identify the number one problem to which all others are subordinate. There is no single fundamental problem, but many fundamental problems, and it is precisely this complex interconnection of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrolled processes and the overall crisis of the planet that represents the fundamental problem number one.¹³

Since 1999, polycrisis has become an increasingly significant phenomenon of our time. However, it is not just a matter of the growth of a phenomenon, but of the need for a fundamental shift in current political and philosophical thinking. The concept of polycrisis shows that the optimism associated with the notion of “the end of history,” achievement of universal human rights, freedom and liberal democracy,¹⁴ was mistaken in its abstractness. Instead of the expected triumph of liberal democratic values, the real politics of liberal democracies have contributed to the polycrisis. Democracy is caught in a double bind. The more democracy, the less democracy; the more progress, the more decline. In connection with this situation, many experts agree that a radical change in thinking is necessary to effectively solve current problems: “We are suffering from a terrible crisis of thinking because it cannot comprehend the complex reality of today.”¹⁵ “We must start thinking about ourselves and the world in a way that will lead to real change.”¹⁶ What needs to be changed is “the social paradigm, the deepest set of assumptions about how the world works.”¹⁷ “We have entered a phase where these unshakeable positive expectations of a better future no longer seem credible [...]. The West is facing a change in thinking.”¹⁸

This emphasis on a shift in thinking is not merely an intellectual exercise. It is a fundamental historical challenge, a practical overcoming of the democratic double bind that can ensure that history will at least continue if we give up hope for its triumph.

¹³ Morin and Kern, *Homeland Earth*, 74.

¹⁴ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3-18.

¹⁵ Morin, “Uniting the Best of Africa and the West.”

¹⁶ Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

¹⁷ Donella Meadows, *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System* (1999), 17, https://donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Leverage_Points.pdf.

¹⁸ Andreas Reckwitz, “Pokrok je možný, ale není zaručený: Západ čeká proměna myšlení” [Progress Is Possible, But Not Guaranteed. The West Is Facing a Transformation of Thought; translated from German], *Respekt*, no. 25 (2024), accessed 26 October 2025, <https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2024/25/pokrok-je-mozny-ale-neni-zaruceny-zapad-ceka-promena-mysleni>.

Edgar Morin and others describe in different words what Tony Fisher refers to as an impasse: "The problems we face on a global scale are being addressed by political leaders who are unable to break free from the 'old' rules. I have previously described this as dead-end politics."¹⁹ According to Fisher, the helplessness of our situation lies in "the inability of the political system to remedy what threatens the functioning of its institutions: the contradictions that cause them and the various stalemates that are caused by political, economic or social crises."²⁰ The danger associated with helplessness is not the fact that we have reached an impasse. The main danger lies in the fact that we simply neutralise this experience, "ignoring the lessons of such politics, and even failing to recognise its political and social significance."²¹

There are lessons to be learned from the politics, and they are at least twofold. First, if we wait for a capable politician to lead society through radical change, we will be waiting in vain. Such an idea belongs to the category of wishful thinking, which at the same time relieves people of their own responsibility and contributes to the maintenance of the systemic crisis in combination with general frustration. The second lesson is that sufficiently long experience of helplessness, on the contrary, reveals a specific layer of sociality. The experience of helplessness means experiencing a so-called teleological failure – as individuals and as a society, we do not know what to pursue, what to strive for. We do not have enough will for the future, we fall into nostalgia, we insist on what was, but can no longer be. The dialectic of agonistic conflict no longer leads to decisions, but to the fragmentation of society. Conflict does not lead to concrete decisions, but continues without effect. In this topological space of disorientation, however, something may be revealed that is not visible in the teleological space – sociality as an ontological dimension of mutual human interconnectedness, sociality as inappropriability and mutual need at the same time.

It is precisely at this specific moment that theatre comes into play, offering a space to make the impasse visible and inhabitable. Theatre itself is communication about communication and, in this sense, autotelic and exceptional – that is, a non-teleological activity that intersects with the political and communicates it through duplication. As such, it has *an easier access* to impasse, not just symptomatically, but diagnostically and descriptively. Theatre has the potential to change the meaning of communication from self-denial to self-transcendence.

An autotelic event, an event that has meaning in itself in the context of teleological endeavour, has a specific power. For art, refusing to be an instrument means being aware of pathological teleology and rebelling against it. However,

¹⁹ Koubová and Fisher, "Aesthetic Exception," 47.

²⁰ Fisher, "Theatre at the Impasse," 141.

²¹ Fisher, "Theatre at the Impasse," 141.

art does not postulate sovereignty over this halted politics, but rather postulates the possibility of embarking on a 'pathless' journey and perceiving it as sufficient. The theatre of impasse highlights the double bond between will and denial of will. However, it is itself a resistance to both, as it does not seek ways to resolve the double bond, nor ways to come to terms with it and thus somehow succumb to it dialectically. The theatre of impasse offers a way to dwell in hopelessness. According to Tony Fisher, with reference to Theodor Adorno, this is precisely how it becomes a source of critical thinking: as a theatre of anti-heroes, clowns, as a theatre that is "crepuscularly grey as after sunset and the end of the world."²²

It is possible that precisely the antiheroes and the twilight-grey clowns can be the bearers of the sociality in question. The clown figure does not long for a homogeneous community united by a single determining power, nor for rational sociality, where contradictions are overcome through deliberative communication. It enjoys and shapes the sociality of singular individuals who are who they are only because they have ceased to aspire to their singularity. Antiheroes and comedians reveal their ontological dependence on other people, thereby breaking down the easy dialectical division between master and slave, original and copy. They become what they are from what they are not. Their position is secondary, but that is precisely what makes it essential.²³ This position is neither one of dominance nor of subordination, nor exists in a space of escape and consolation: it is a position of strength. Strength proceeding from kinship with other people, from their mutual need in times of strife and disorientation. It is a strength that French philosopher Frédéric Worms²⁴ would call the strength of living with chronic illness, of living with the knowledge of what it means to be dead while still alive. Jacques Derrida might characterise this phenomenon as a life in which fulfilment "must have the structure of a promise,"²⁵ because in the present, every fulfilment is accompanied by the real force of its own self-destruction.

Opening up the space of hopelessness as a prerequisite for making specific sociality, critical thinking, and political knowledge visible was the subject of two artistic research experiments.

²² Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 81. (Adorno comments on Samuel Beckett's plays.)

²³ Alice Koubová, *Myslet z druhého místa. K otázce performativní filosofie* [Thinking from the Second Place. On the Question of Performative Philosophy] (Praha: Filosofía, 2019).

²⁴ Frédéric Worms, *Les maladies chroniques de la démocratie* (Paris: PUF, 2017).

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 78.

Strachy (Fears)

The starting point for the *Strachy* (Fears) project was the coincidence of two significant events in Czech culture in 2021. The first event was a wave of public statements about the manipulative, abusive and sexualised behaviour of people in positions of power within cultural institutions and art universities. The initiative *Ne! musíš to vydržet* (You Don't! Have to Endure It) at Prague's DAMU theatre academy sparked a wave of testimonies at other schools. The second event was the steadily worsening economic and status situation of the cultural sector. After a difficult period of Covid measures, which relentlessly and unsystematically affected independent artists and cultural institutions (government decrees used terms such as "ban on spectators" and "ban on culture"),²⁶ the cultural community experienced a no less heartless period of follow-up, best illustrated by the famous statement of the head of state, Miloš Zeman, that he would not give artists any systemic support because "artists created their most beautiful works when they were hungry."²⁷

This situation of external threat and internal criticism led to a massive wave of cultural advocacy, which, however, had a paradoxical, even stalemate-like effect. On the one hand, artists made efforts to defend the importance of the cultural sector by pointing out that art is a pillar of democracy and a co-creator of the value system, the most important tool for the survival of society. On the other hand, they argued that there is no democracy in art and that it is good to be prepared for this, because in art, everyone is ultimately on their own. Many confirmed that forms of exploitation, self-exploitation, clientelism, corruption and personality cults have always been part of art and that it is necessary to adapt to this if one wants to be an artist. Protests within the cultural scene against its customary law were assessed in warlike terms as grenade throwing, youth terrorism, modern-day people's courts, self-proclaimed death sentences, etc.

I carried out the artistic research and performative lecture *Strachy* (Fears) in collaboration with Miřenka Čechová, a dancer and the artistic director of the Tantehorse theatre group. My personal role in this project was quite complex – I was involved in the research as a dramaturge, performer and philosopher, and at

²⁶ See "Kultura je taky služba!" [Culture Is Also a Service!], *České středisko ITI* (Czech ITI Centre), accessed 26 October 2025, <https://iti.idu.cz/kultura-je-taky-sluzba/>.

²⁷ "Smutek, vrchol cynismu. Zeman výrokem o hladových umělcích pobouřil" [Sadness, the Height of Cynicism. Zeman Causes Outrage with his Statement about Starving Artists], *iDNES.cz*, 10 October 2020, accessed 26 October 2025, https://www.idnes.cz/kultura/film-televize/milos-zeman-michal-pavlicek-rosta-novak.A201010_095222_filmvideo_spm.

the same time I had very intensive experience with the topic as the Vice-dean for Research at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU) and as an ethical mediator.

The *Strachy* project initially focused on documentary research on artists and their experiences with the work environment. We recorded a total of 25 interviews and identified recurring patterns and power mechanisms that were not only political but also psychological in nature. It turned out that fear was the central problem in almost all cases. We then selected key messages from the interviews and used them to create an introductory slam performance lecture:

I am afraid that I will not be able to defend myself.
It will turn out that I'm worthless.
They will think I am a philistine.
They will fire me.
That it will lose its meaning.
I won't belong among them.
I'll lose all my illusions about people.
That bitch will report me.
That I'll lose all certainty.
I'll be up against everyone.
I'm afraid to get out of bed in the morning.
They will ridicule me.
That I don't have the strength to change anything.
That young people today no longer care about art, that they don't appreciate
what we do for them.
I'll never get another role from them.
I will break something valuable.
That rumours will prevail over facts.
I'm afraid that everyone will remain silent.
That they will tarnish everything we have built for so long.
That we only deal with trivialities in art.
Someone will recognise my mistakes.
That maybe I'm not really humble.
Out of shallowness.
Everyone will talk about something other than what really matters.
That I won't be able to support myself and my children.
I'm afraid of violent changes.
That they will think I don't have the guts.
That I won't be able to adapt.
Of emptiness.
That I will have nothing to draw on.

That this profession won't allow me to have normal relationships at the same time.
That I'm not talented enough.
That they will say I have no sense of humour.
That nothing will change.
That I have nothing to say.
That I won't help anything with this work.
That I'll remain misunderstood.
I'm afraid I won't be able to do it.
That I cannot change anything on my own.
That my tiny actions will have no effect.
That I won't be able to touch the truth.
That this world simply has no future.
That this lifestyle is not sustainable.
I am afraid that everyone will remain silent.
That only uncertainty awaits me.
That they will rush in here too.
I am afraid that even today we will not understand each other.²⁸

The data collected from interviews with active artists led us to search for relevant scientific models that describe the dynamics of power relations based on fear. In this context, the drama triangle model developed by American psychiatrist Stephen Karpman seemed very appropriate. The drama triangle presents the interlocking power and psychological relationships that can be understood as a kind of social game that people play to keep each other in a trap. Schematically, this game features a Tyrant, a Victim and a Rescuer, and it is important for all three roles that they are not interested in leaving their role and improving their living conditions, straightening out relationships, living their own lives, but in maintaining their role as a power, transforming their fear into control over the other two participants. Everyone therefore works to ensure that their situation does not change. In this way, they ensure that they always feel that others are to blame for the pain in their lives.

My article on the topic²⁹ was used as an attractor to which the very form of the performative lecture is drawn, but remains resistant to it. The text was divided into fragments, which we worked with separately, using various artistic means.

²⁸ The script for the performative lecture *Strachy* [Fears].

²⁹ Alice Koubová, "Problémem hierarchie není její hierarchičnost. V čem je tedy problém?" [The Problem with Hierarchy Is Not Its Hierarchical Nature. So What Is the Problem?], *CEDIT*, no. 7 (2021): 18-19.

To illustrate the triangle of drama, we used statements by representatives of the cultural community.

The next sections of the interpretation took the form of a dance with research findings, rap improvisations on the theme of interruption and rest, PowerPoint presentations working only with projections of materials and objects, and a parallel dialogue that deconstructs itself by insisting on its own assertions. The conclusion of the lecture offers an autoethnographic entry against the visual backdrop of a projection of the landscape capturing the moving shadows of both performers.

The interplay between the dancer and the philosopher created a force field built on the principle of artistic resistance to academic verbal interpretation, and it was precisely this field that was the dead end in which the critical discussion of the lecture participants could begin after its conclusion. The discussion, as an integral or rather key part of the research event, did not provide a solution or offer a way to submit to the helplessness. Instead, the joint debate allowed us to observe the singular event of the constitution of the sociality of the impasse, which often lasted longer than the performative lecture itself. In some versions of the performance, participants joined the discussion by speaking incomprehensible words into a microphone, creating a cloud of sound without any specific contours.

Propojme se včera (Let's Connect Yesterday)

This project ran for one year with a group of young adult dancers led by Mířenka Čechová, dancer and choreographer Markéta Vacovská, and myself. The starting point for the project was the collective awareness of the state of polycrisis, as described by Edgar Morin, and the related question of what stance can be taken in such a hopeless situation. Many scientific disciplines (psychology, social work, social ecology, democratic studies, political science, environmental studies, economics, sociology, anthropology, social media, disinformation and defence studies) focus on resilience research in this context. However, resilience has not yet been addressed in artistic research.

The project took the form of a series of laboratories in which academics presented their findings on the topics of crisis, democracy, trauma, recovery, transformation and resilience to a dance group. The laboratories included a discussion section using participatory methods of collective reflection, followed by a section for personal diary entries. The final movement section focused on finding literally physical “postures” or “shifts” in relation to the knowledge gained.

After a series of laboratories, the group spent a week in residence in the Ralsko Geopark area, again partly with a group of scientists from the Czech Academy of Sciences. The Ralsko Geopark is an exemplary case of a geographical area that has

undergone many crises. During World War II, the Ralsko area was depopulated and served as a military zone for the German Air Force. In the post-war period, it was not fully repopulated and was used by the Czechoslovak Army. In the meantime, uranium was discovered here, and its mining fundamentally changed the landscape. After 1968, the area was occupied by the Soviet Army. Ralsko has seen a succession of German, Czech and Russian populations, and Volhynian Czechs and ethnic minorities from the Czech Republic were also moved here. Since World War II, seventeen villages in the Ralsko region have disappeared irretrievably. The entire area was closed off from the outside world for a long time, and places not used by the military became overgrown with vegetation.

The artistic group explored the topology of this space, its dead ends and hopeless historical moments. The result was a performative walk that staged situations from the past activities of selected extinct villages – mass in the church, dancing in the pub, meeting at the crossroads.

The choreography of the final performative lecture *Propojme se včera* (Let's Connect Yesterday) emerged from the laboratories and residential stay as a specific form of physical recording of the entire year-long process by the dance group. In addition to this line, an explanatory text was also created, which linearly explained individual scientific terms: paradigm, anomaly, liminal state, plasticity, adaptation, resistance, resilience.

The performance lecture itself took place in the library of the Czech Academy of Sciences at the Národní třída in Prague after closing time. The library space was not modified in any way for the lecture. The dance group and the philosopher adapted to the space and, at the same time, transformed it through their performance into their own stage scenery. During the lecture, participants were given the opportunity to move freely throughout the library space. They moved around at will – watching the dancers, watching the lecturer, or staying in one place. The lecture and dance choreography were presented in juxtaposition. The dance choreography did not seek to illustrate the lecture. For this reason, the entire first third of the performance was purely movement, without words, without the presence of the philosopher, and without any interpretation.

The temporal primacy of dance over verbal expression created a gestural and expressive environment into which the figure of the philosopher wedged herself in the second third, intersecting with it and, in a sense, having to ignore it in favour of her own expression. The expert commentary did not attempt to make an impression of artistic expression, but stuck to the boundaries of scientific presentation, while abandoning its standardised placement in space, its gesturality and its conformist rhythm in time.

The dead end was presented in the performance as a place after crossing an irreversible threshold, as a space in which it is no longer possible to continue in the way that was possible until now, but it is not yet clear how it is possible to exist differently:

When the system left the order to which it can no longer return, it reached a so-called liminal state. A liminal state is an intermezzo or an inferno. In this hopeless situation, the highest degree of uncertainty meets the highest degree of potentiality. Both a threat and an unknown form of continuation.

Crossing the boundaries of physical exhaustion, crossing the boundaries of emotional security, crossing the boundaries of one's personal zone, crossing the boundaries of a neighbouring state, crossing the boundaries of democratic action, crossing the boundaries of existential security, crossing planetary boundaries, crossing the boundaries of irreversibility.³⁰

The third part of the performance was again exclusively dance, supplemented at the end by speeches from the dancers through their diary entries, singing, experiences and reflections:

Andrej: In a state of hopelessness, perhaps the only thing that helps me is not to succumb to it completely. To keep a cool head and stick to my own ideas. Not to undermine myself.

Miša: As far as I can remember, after various attempts to fight a dead end and look for the positive in it, what usually helped me was saying out loud that it was all just crap; I don't know what to do about it, so I'll just wait. That always helped me to relax.

Eliška: It helped me to be with people I could observe. The opportunity to be inspired by their stories, thinking and behaviour. To overcome the mindset that I have to do everything myself.

Martin: I don't know what helped me, probably nothing: I rather feel that I never got out of any dead ends. Perhaps what helped me was that I accepted dead ends as my own... Of course, sometimes it takes years to get used to ourselves.³¹

³⁰ The script for the performative lecture *Propojme se včera* [Let's Connect Yesterday].

³¹ Script of *Propojme se včera*.

In the final minutes, the interpretation offered the possibility of existence in a situation of liminality. The philosopher moved to the extreme positions of academic expression. She did not abandon them, but transformed, shaped and stretched them. She explicitly acknowledged human individual dependence, dependence on one's surroundings when it comes to remaining in a hopeless situation.

During the performance, a space of tension, attraction, provocation, resonance and resistance to the merging of the philosopher and the dancers gradually built up. However, this was not a rigid juxtaposition of two immutable performative forms, but rather their mutual topological intervention. Each performance tested how close science can and must come to art in order to open up a hitherto overlooked space of meaning that cannot be identified and evaluated either as an artistic performance or as a public scientific lecture, but which, precisely because of this, offers a glimpse towards the sociality of a dead end. Placing the participants in the space of this stalemate, rather than a situation of compromise and harmonisation, and allowing them to move freely through the space meant that the choreographers of the performance were not only its creators. The key to the performance was whether or not the participants would take over the created space of tension. Any "guiding" step would have cancelled out what this spatial intervention of two approaches could originally "perhaps" offer, namely the interweaving of singular sociality. The final challenge of the performance was also a risky sentence that sought to end the talk in time, to utter an ending that had the hope of being the beginning of action from what had just been organised.

Conclusion

This article has presented two cases of artistic research that explore the topology of impasse in the current socio-political context and, at the same time, help to inhabit this space. Both research projects attempted neither to resolve the hopelessness of the situation, nor to submit to it helplessly. Artistic research may have this ability precisely because it is itself a kind of impasse, a tension between two established worlds: the world of science and the world of art. Both of these worlds work with uncertainty, experimentation and unpredictability, but at the same time they are predictable to a certain extent. They settle into performative identities, institutionalised formats, and self-affirmation often enforced by political struggles over the funding of educational institutions. The condition for success and publishability in science is precisely formalised, yet highly predictable and homogenised academic verbalism. Articles in prestigious journals have a completely formulaic structure, sequence of arguments, and

formalised vocabulary. In contrast, art very often refers to its absolute sovereignty and freedom, its uniqueness, and therefore its uncriticisability. However, artistic singularity as a fetish homogenises art. Many of its works are strange in a very predictable way.

Artistic research can be an activity in which art moves towards the attractor of science while simultaneously resisting its appropriating power of formal language and expression. It can be an activity of a scientific discipline that is subject to the attractiveness of artistic singularity but resists it. This dual interaction of attraction and resistance opens up a space within artistic research that has not only a scientific and artistic role, but also a socio-political role in the current era. It is a space of stalemate in which it is possible to exist, endure tension, and open up the ossified shells of scientific formalism, as well as to settle the infinitely rapidly oscillating singularities of artistic expression, which are one and the same. Artistic research *can* then represent art brought to the threshold of research knowledge in such a way that it tears art from its self-affirming autonomy, just as it emancipates scientific knowledge from self-sufficient implosion into itself. In this sense, we can argue that artistic research supports the ability of both science and art to end in time – to stop their journey of self-affirmation in time. Artistic research interrupts scientific thinking in the name of concrete action. However, it also interrupts the pragmatic emphasis on the teleology of action in favour of reflection. In artistic research, art can act as a chronic disease of science – not as an assimilated partner or an incomparable opponent. Artistic research arises within the framework of communication between art and science, which has the power of attraction and resistance. In this communication, science comes to the conclusion that it should fall silent in time so that art can take effect, but art, thus called upon, begins to act differently than it is accustomed to. To act in such a way as to create space for the other, to be able to end in such a way that something previously unseen enters our visual field. The philosophy of artistic research is not focused on solutions, but on the effect, impact and subversion of the dead end and its self-destruction.

In the area of the impasse that artistic research has opened up and inhabited, there *may* be further space for discovering sociality, which implies a politics 'tuned' to a state of mutual dependence, to the ontological layer of social existence as a necessity. It opens the door for us at once from totalitarian tyranny and neoliberal plundering – all we have to do is stay in the impasse long enough and look around.

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