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**Exhibition Review: *too much, too soon!***


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*too much, too soon!*. Open Space. Vienna, Austria: December 15, 2018–January 19, 2019.

There is a certain distance between art and politics. This distance is usually willingly created by those who speak of these concepts and intend to benefit from the space created between them. It is because of this that the two concepts offer possible definitions of themselves. Politics perceives itself as “non-art,” as if it were in a direct relationship with what is real; art, on the other hand, seeks to pursue its own horizons beyond the reach of politics. However, this determination of the way in which the distance is constructed does not help to clarify said distinction. Indeed, there is a question of borders and limitations insofar as there exists a distance worth mentioning that is, indeed, discussed.

Rather than concentrating on the question of the distance between art and politics, focusing on questions of “art and distance” and “politics and distance” can at least provide us with the advantage of understanding the source of said distance and the existence of “difference” that has a diversifying as well as unifying power of a different order, thus producing a new paradigm. Is art driven by maintaining distance to things or to itself? Or is that which art desires in fact some kind of plane of immanence (as described by Deleuze as the image of thought) in order that we—art historians, aestheticians, critics, etc.—then add an external point by imposing the distance apparatus on it? These are undoubtedly questions that determine one’s conception of the world. Nevertheless, we should approach these questions not from our worldviews, but in terms of their relationships with the objects of the concepts with which we have dealt. Is it art that is trying to distance itself from politics by acting in accordance with a plane of immanence? And does not Friedrich Nietzsche’s most severe criticism of Immanuel Kant’s *Ding an sich* (thing-in-itself) consist in the point that art calls for us to imagine a vision independent from what art has conjured up? How does art confront externalities by trying to establish itself within itself? And how does distance differentiate itself from its ever-increasing quality of being distant?

It is in light of these questions that I regarded Open Space,<sup>1</sup> a Vienna-based initiative for art and visual culture founded in 2007 by Gülsen Bal, and its recent exhibition *too much, too soon!* Curated by Bal and Walter Seidl, the exhibition built itself on the idea of Europe

1. See [www.openspace-zkp.org/2013](http://www.openspace-zkp.org/2013).

and focused on the euro crisis, the absence of a political left in the face of rising right-wing movements, an ever-growing problem of immigration, and phenomena such as the necropolitics that extends itself from concentration camps toward today's politics with firm steps.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argued that “Es gibt keinen Staat in Europa” (There is no state in Europe). But Etienne Balibar reminded us of the themes of exception and sovereignty with reference to the Bosnian genocide in *We, the People of Europe?: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (2001). Balibar boldly underlined how the reason for the existence of the state had to do with sovereignty and the production of exceptions. In a way, *Race, Nation, Class* (which he wrote with Immanuel Wallerstein in 1988) showed how the “nation-form,” which was the book's basic proposition, worked in a concealed manner during the twenty-first century—because this was the issue with which the previous century had seemed to come to terms, but that remained present nonetheless. Now, in this era of fascist governments that have, in actuality, spread to Europe and the world, we must necessarily rethink this impression.

The exhibition *too much, too soon!* brought together politically connoted works by seven artists—Mustafa Akkaya, Tim Brennan, Aydan Murtezaoğlu, Erkan Özgen, Lala Raščić, Milica Tomić, and Christina Werner—at Open Space's venue Mekan68 in Vienna. From England to the Netherlands, what was once Yugoslavia to Turkey, and on from there to Cyprus, each artist is actually part of a wider framework of projects. The selected works could each be viewed as a stage upon which each artist struggles to face his or her own history. These historical fragments also showed the relationship between major and minor forms of politics—or, perhaps better put: they represented an attempt to take a broadly sweeping look at the politics established between those who perpetrate injustice and those who are unjustly treated.

In her video *One day, instead of one night, a burst of machine-gun fire will flash if light cannot come otherwise* (2009), Tomić takes her automatic rifle and walks through streets of Belgrade that were the sites of partisan and anti-fascist resistance against the German Wehrmacht carrying packs of bullets in a shopping bag. This ghost, who walks with confidence amid others' unforgiving gazes, is undoubtedly from the past. Nobody recognizes her or even sees her. In the video, the war memories of the partisans in these streets provide a language for this violent image of a woman with no positive or negative presence. The artist symbolically takes over the partisans' weapon, even though there is no barricade from which to use it, placing it at the battlefield of the ongoing necropolitical war that is being waged with the same invisibility on the street [Image 1].

Murtezaoğlu's photographs from the series *In Charge* (2009) put us in the same political invisibility mode. From house interiors to the streets where action takes place, in the background, or right in front of our eyes, Murtezaoğlu focuses on entirely unfamiliar themes and on the framework within which she finds herself. These themes, which include politics, cannot be fully captured but are kept under control and pose serious questions about politics' substance and actions. The political question arising from the distances between the themes and the covering of these distances is transformed into distances that cannot be transcended. If the car that passes through the action will never be associated with that action, then the audience looking at this photo will never relate to the moment captured within the frame. Here, the distance will continue to impose its existence in all its power [Image 2].



IMAGE 1. *In Charge* (2009) by Aydan Murtezaoğlu; courtesy Edition Block.

Özgen brought the question of the nature of this subversion regarding the identity of political subjectivity to the viewer by simply employing a ski mask in his installation piece *First Untitled* (2012). How, in this case, does the identity of the resistance—and hence its representation—give us opportunities to alter existing political relations? How do we fill in the subject mode? Özgen refers to the Gezi Park Resistance with this negative image. How the artist sustains this image in the future can answer the very question that he proposes.

Like Bal's previous curatorial endeavor *Lost in Europe*,<sup>2</sup> this exhibition also played down the topics of migration and settlement. Yet, in *too much, too soon!*, the issues of migration and settlement represented the question in the background—forming a basis for each political statement even while not being situated at the center of the political problem. The problem of migration is omnipresent in these works displayed at the exhibition: Brennan's journey from the Balkans to Turkey and on to Armenia, where the notes he kept became a tangible poem in his in situ performance *Fortress Europe #82* (2018); in Werner's video *The Boys Are Back* (2015–16), where we saw only the feet of the Dutch right-wing politician Geert Wilders and heard the way he uses the fear of Islam as he speaks from a podium. Akkaya's newly produced installation piece *The imputed Power* (2018) also showed how the identity formed therein always includes a question of immigration as we face

2. *Lost in Europe* was on view October 19–November 9, 2018, at Mekan68 in Vienna. This exhibition was conceived by Richard Appignanesi and Gülsen Bal to coincide with the appearance of a special issue of the art journal *Third Text* under the same title, *Lost in Europe: in the wake of Britain's inner emigration*, edited by Richard Appignanesi, Vol. 32, nos. 5–6 (2018). See <http://thirdtext.org/open-space-lost-in-europe-exhibition>.



IMAGE 2. *First Untitled* (2012) by Erkan Özgen; courtesy the artist.



IMAGE 3. Installation view of *too much, too soon!* (2019) at Open Space, Vienna; photograph by Orkun Zorlu.

the arbitrariness of the buffer zone between Northern and Southern Cyprus and thereby unwittingly become part of the ongoing military confrontation [Image 3].

The exhibition *too much, too soon!* raised a question that is not seriously considered by most contemporary art but does pertain to our political agenda: What do we do with this increased “distance-lessness”? Eventually, the matter comes down to how we conduct a discourse about being within borders and limitations and being against borders and limitations, as well as about transcendence and immanence. And the question of immanence has been discussed by philosophers over many centuries.

A philosophy that can be considered a political entity needs to grasp the ontological dimension within this plane—that is: distance itself from its distance. And on the other hand, art that considers the question of politics must also be associated with the constitutive forces of externality—or, to put it differently, must close the gap with distance. In this way, we can approach the question of why and how necropolitics dominates the plane of immanence in our everyday lives, including everyone and everything.

This essay was translated from the Turkish by Robert Allison. ■

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