# THE DUSK OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

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"I wish *your* epidemic was over so I could see you!" That is what my 10-year-old granddaughter said after about two months had passed since the lockdown. At first, I was surprised. Then I started to understand. She had felt like what had happened had nothing to do with her and what she had been doing until now. All that had happened; not just the pandemic, but also the often contradictory decisions taken one after another, the warnings, as well as the transition of all her classes and fun activities to an online format she was already familiar with, had allowed her to put a visible distance between her own little world and what had been going on. If we were to seek out those who are responsible for the major chaos generated by the pandemic –of which, for now, we can only see the tip of the iceberg,– it certainly would not be those born at the beginning of this century, which made its entrance with wars, crises, and disasters. No matter how much we complain, it is us who are responsible for what is happening, us who have been waiting, our hands tied, for what had been coming for decades now.

Like all other countries, Turkey has also gone, and continues to go through this period implementing its own precautionary measures. The most striking of these measures was that those under the age of 20 (this was later lowered to 18) and those aged 65 and above were directed to not leave their home and were only allowed to go outside one day per week and only for 4-6 hours. In other words, the part of the population that is not directly involved in production, and, it seems, considered to be insignificant as consumers. The little ones could not go out so as not to spread the virus, and the older ones so that they would not get infected and die! What mattered was that the wheels of the production and retail kept turning at all costs. They even aimed, if possible, to turn the crisis into an opportunity. But at what cost?

What was especially surprising was that the rapid pace came to a quick and sudden stop. We were faced with this sudden stop at an utterly unexpected moment, because this acceleration had continued even though we knew more or less that it was not sustainable. The global economy, stock markets, social interaction all stopped. It was a kind of standstill that even those of us who referenced slowness, who made efforts toward movements such as città slow, slow food and the like, could not have dreamed of.

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Suddenly we were surrounded by prophecies, modellings, and future scenarios. Narratives of epidemics in history became popular. Humans living on the face of the earth started questioning the future in an unprecedented state of confusion, drawing on news and information from different sources. Yet there was one thing that was certain; and that was absolute uncertainty.

Nevertheless, some things can already be seen. The existing inequalities in the world have become even more glaring, unemployment and poverty have reached outrageous proportions greater than ever before. (To get a sense of the situation, it would suffice to remember that the owner of Amazon has been adding $11,000 to his fortune every second of the lockdown. And that is 24 hours a day.) Whereas those at the very top of the pyramid are shrinking in number while growing exponentially fatter, there is a precipitate slide from the middle sections to the bottom and it does not look like it is going to stop. This is happening both between social strata and between countries, and even in the world of cultural actors.

Leaving aside the surprises that the virus will have in store for all of us during its subsequent waves or after it has mutated, if what determines the future is the concept of uncertainty, we will need to shape accordingly our words and language, which are the building blocks of our thoughts. For example, since the normal no longer has any use-value, we could start by removing the word "normal" from dictionaries. Secondly, we should think again before using compound words beginning with the prefix "re-" such as "reopening" or "restarting". This for two reasons: Do we want the flow of things to be like it was before the pandemic? And anyway, even if we do, those things will no longer persist.

Let us take a look at what has happened in the realm of cities. In the last 30-40 years, we have witnessed the rise of and dizzying race between metropolises, cosmopolitan cities, and megapolises. Big cities have snatched away the lion's share of the population, the economy, social mobility and and the production and consumption of culture, while leaving the rest of those countries in poverty, inequality, deprivation, as well as desolation. These big cities, or –to put it in terms frequently used by those of us working in the field of culture– cities (or "capitals") of culture, have exploited, sucked up, and depleted the resources produced by all the people living in those countries. Everywhere in the world, practices applied by initiatives on cultural production and sustainable development have been extensively scrutinized. (In this regard, it is important to note that the long-term projects and collaborations with a wide variety of cities developed as part of the Agenda 21 for Culture constitute a major exception.) Big cities were the ones to receive the heaviest blow during the Covid19 pandemic. Now, the time has come to put to a long rest to constructs such as the "creative city" or "creative class" whose authors themselves have recently begun to revise. It is now time to focus on what kinds of action can be taken by cities of smaller scale, which are not autarkic in the narrow sense, yet are viable and closely interact with healthy, citizens who enjoy life.

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The concept of "precariat" was deemed appropriate to describe the situation of those working in the field of arts and culture and the efforts spent in this field, and most analyses were based on this. But from now on, we will need to concentrate on expounding the concept of "survival" and figuring out how and under what conditions it can actually be possible. As in other fields, it will become a necessity for us to forget the pre-pandemic canons and relentlessly search for new ways of creating, producing, and sharing in art. When assessing cultural projects, we will need to place their impact on health and the environment at the top of any checklist, even above their economic and social impact.

Looking at the last decade, we frequently encounter the word "Anthropocene" in titles of biennials, large-scale interdisciplinary exhibitions, debates on art, and even in cultural policy documents. It seems that "Anthropocene" has become a keyword that opens all the doors to recognition. The word refers to how humans take center stage by trampling on all living things (which include not only nature and underground and aboveground resources, but also bacteria and viruses!) We are all currently witnessing the sinking of an era. And only my grandchild and her generation will know the name of the era that will rise in its place.

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