“The Paris experience is a perpetual war,” said Balzac. [1] It was a war that took place in the poor quarters and the rich neighbourhoods of Paris, joined by the “drifters whose work was never rewarded” and the stock, security, cheque, bond and wealth hunters; it was a social war between the ones “who abode by everything due to their humility, weakness or apathy”, and the ones who were bent on making them suffer everything.

The cities of all other countries, just like Paris, the “capital of the 19 century”, are the classical grounds of today’s metropolises because of the same war. The Paris, Berlin or St. Petersburg of the time are the seeds or ancestors that incorporated the now fully-manifest realities of contemporary metropolises. For example, London in 1844 made young Engels write: “Only after cruising the streets of the capital for a day or two, after laboriously making way through the endless queues of men and vehicles, and after walking through the shantytowns can one realise that the Londoners were forced to waive the remnants of humanity between them to create the wonders of civilisation that now haunts their streets, and have left the plethora of powers within them to eternal slumber.” [2] Who can claim that the contemporary “Kafkaesque world” which prohibits mankind from becoming human, from attaining his own emancipation, and condemns him to a self that is “alienated”, “crippled” is not the outcome the “waiver” observed in London of 1844? As observed in London as early as the 1840s, the people were “piling on top of each other as if they had nothing in common, and no relations whatsoever” in the modern city. According to
Engels, the only common quality of the urban people was an unsaid agreement “that made everybody stand on his side of the pavement to avoid intercepting the masses that were flowing down the streets”. “Nobody even thinks of honouring another by even such a little effort as a glance,” said Engels; “This bestial apathy and the emotional isolation of every man in the circle of his personal interests is becoming more repulsive and even less gracious as the number of individuals in a limited space increases over time.” This war of indifference and interests was being conducted “so unabashedly” under circumstances of barbaric shiftlessness, rigid individuality on one side and inexplicable misery on the other, that “man”, said Engels, “is crushed under the outcomes of our social state as manifest here, and is appalled at how this demented corporeal entity can still stand together.” [3]

We are now in a better position to grasp what mankind has been “forced to waive the remnants of humanity” in order to create the wonder of a city, and to what extent this abandoning is present today by studying their relationship with one another. Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s film Uzak, which was awarded the “Grand Prix” at Cannes, gives evidence of what is to be said about people today, who are “emotionally isolated in the circle of their personal interests”. This film has shown us that the interpersonal relations in the metropolis are, in effect, an act of being abandoned as a continuation of the “war” that has not seen truce since the 19 century. Lack of love, egotism and cynicism are free to roam in the great city. Nuri Bilge Ceylan has provided us with a striking cross-section of this fact (that only the eye which knows the true suffering of mankind can see) in his film, Uzak.

**Istanbul: “Poverty without Poetic Licence”**

The film portrays Yusuf, who is compelled to come to Istanbul when the factory in his hometown closes down and leaves him unemployed. Yusuf takes residence with his relative Mahmut, who is an advertisement photographer. But is Istanbul “what it used to be?” The social war has forced people into waiving their most humane qualities. Beside this miserable condition of humanity, Istanbul has
turned into a “mine of misery”, which Marx speaks of as being “exploited with less cost and more profit than a silver mine” by speculators. [4] This mine operates with such actions as “Wealth-related gentrification movements, the demolishing of old neighbourhoods, the construction of higher buildings to accommodate banks and offices, the expansion of streets to allow the business traffic to flow”, and carries a dialectical conflict within. The dialectic is the consequence of the coexistence of the poor, who, as a result of gentrification movements and expansion of streets, are forced to take residence in ever worse shantytowns, and the rich, who live in better conditions every day. Being one of the most spectacular “misery mines” across the world, Istanbul experiences this dialectical conflict not in the grand poetic manner expressed by some of the finest poets of literature, but in a state completely deprived of poetic licence; this is a “thrifty, painstakingly combed-through poverty that is determined by the glittering strands of corruption”. [5] If the modus operandi of life today still offers us the same things as the only choice, it will be meaningful to take this dialectic as the fundamental criterion when discussing Istanbul. We have discussed the city by the Fatih/Harbiye binary opposition axis, and continue to do so. [6] Fatih and Harbiye are far away. But now the skyscrapers and the shanties exist side by side. Now it is time to realise that the true conflict in large cities lies in
the dialectic of the likes of Cairo or Sao Paulo, where misery and luxury have only a street that separates them. The perilous opposition within this dialectic compels people to an irreversible detachment through an exaggerated 19-century tradition. This detachment results in a mental state that is unique to the urban, pacified masses: loneliness within crowds.

The Sorrowful Face of Resistance

All criticism directed toward post-industrial cities includes an implicit or explicit criticism of the modern life that brings new types of dependence relations between people. Studying the effects of life amongst masses on the human being, the sociologist Simmel founded his criticism on this basis. “The deepest dilemmas of modern life are brought forward from the individual’s struggle to preserve his existential independence and his individuality,” comments Simmel. This struggle is the individual’s “resistance against being equalised or becoming identical to urban life, and the fight against losing face within the social-technological mechanism.” [7] An unavoidable situation brought forward by this resistance is the fact that “The individual, under certain circumstances, feels an unprecedented loneliness and abandonment among the metropolitan masses.” [8] This loneliness among crowds is the sorrowful face of the
individual’s struggle to preserve his existential independence and his individuality, in other words, his resistance against being equalised with urban life. According to Simmel, what is perceived as a clear detachment from society is, in reality, “one of the most fundamental forms of true socialising.” [9]

The sad situation of an individual feeling “an unprecedented loneliness and abandonment among the metropolitan masses” was first introduced by Rousseau. Rousseau’s loneliness among the masses as a man who has endured all the future suffering of a newly-sprouting life while at the end of another, is the first instance of resistance against being equalised with modern life. Being the son of a watchmaker from Geneva, Rousseau arrives at Paris without any money in his pocket, and starts frequenting “salons” and “cafés” to make new acquaintances and enter the intellectual circle. His loneliness starts with the realisation that he does not share the same world with the learned elites of this circle. Rousseau not only openly stated that the newly-sprouting life was forming an unequal and unjust world, but also expressed his reality without concern: “I am lonely among people.” [10]

“The world is at an end for me,” said Rousseau, “Here they can do me neither harm nor good. I have nothing to hope for or fear of in this world; I am
happy at the bottom of the abyss, as a mortal unhappy and divinely emotionless. Now, whatever is outside me is strange to me. I have no brethren, relatives or look-alikes. I am as alien as having fallen from another planet.” [11] Rousseau felt close to no social stratus, “I am left to my own measures and feed from my essence,” he said. [12]

Rousseau was critical of 18 century Paris, and the inter-personal war of which Paris was representative. The Russian witness to the “social war” of the 19 century, when ambiguity and conflicts reached the zenith, was Dostoyevsky. The protagonist of the Notes from Underground says “no one looked like me, and I looked like no one. I could not stop thinking, ‘I’m all alone, but they are all united’,” [13] and exemplifies perfectly what Simmel called “one of the most fundamental forms of true socialising”, namely, the condition of being lonely amidst crowds.

The photographer Mahmut lives his own loneliness and abandonment within a crowd of twelve million, but now it is the 21 century, and the suffering of the “social war” two hundred years ago has become an unbearable, hellish agony. Needless to say, the combat and the resistance of the 21 century has also waived some of its humanity in the battlefield populated by twelve million warriors. Therefore, the loneliness of Mahmut will not be a “resistance” a la
Rousseau or Dostoyevsky, but will only bear the sorrowful face of it.

Home: A Small Shelter

Mahmut is also downtrodden by life. He in a way resembles the beaten man in Cervantes. Although he wanted to be a director or a freelance photography artist, he could only be a run-of-the-mill photographer who does cheap work, and the reality, which did not grant what he wanted, which kept him from his aspirations and dreams, stands relentlessly in the way. But Mahmut is almost crippled; he makes no move against life. He does not try to pull himself clear of the quagmire he fell into even when he has a chance to do so. He kicks and bashes the pieces of ceramic he photographed after his work is done. But when he encounters the view that will be the photograph of his life, he gives in to sloth, and does not step out of his car to take a picture. During the film, we are frequently taken to Mahmut’s bookshelf where he keeps a picture of Dostoyevsky. It is apparent that he likes Dostoyevsky. That must mean that he is aware of the “underground man” and his reality. Would it not be expected of him to sense a similarity between his reality and the reality of the underground man? Alas, he does not. Worse still, he does, but he lets it pass with a cynical indifference. This life does not contain even a trace of the
struggle the clerk from St. Petersburg initiates to protect his dignity. [14]

This crippled, shiftless man seeks shelter only in his house. His entire world consists of his house. Mahmut’s house is a perfect example of the inner circle as defined by Benjamin, namely, it is “not only his universe, but his shelter”, [15] where he hides his crippled individuality from the outer world.

According to Simmel, “The most fundamental social organising phase to be encountered both in the past and present is a relatively small community that almost entirely excludes neighbouring alien groups or other nonconforming sects, but is barely homogenised to allow the individual very little room to develop his personal skills and indulge in his free activities.” [16] This “very little room” allowed for the free activities of the individual translates to the modern city life as an inner circle as small as Mahmut’s house, where the individual takes shelter for his one dear freedom. But the freedom experienced in the cramped quarters is not the freedom of a human being emancipated from himself and his alienated existence, but a freedom that rightly befalls his crippled self. Mahmut’s freedom is watching pornographic films when he takes a break from Tarkovsky. But he is “as unhappy as the sewage pipes”. [17] All he does is
to join his friends and talk about film and photography over drinks every now and then. He always goes to the same bar, always alone. He is a man unsuccessful in marriage and unsatisfied in sexuality. That is why he is cynical enough to break thirty, forty hearts a day. This is exactly why his house, which shelters him from the outside world, seems like the mysterious and perilous mansions of horror films. “The layout of the furniture is also the blueprint for death traps, and the order of the rooms commands the victim to the escape route he should follow.” [18] His battles with small town man Yusuf turn Mahmut’s house into such a battlefield.

Mahmut begins to grapple with Yusuf because he cannot act against life that shoves him to a corner. This is nothing but stubborn resistance which he employs to convince himself that his shameful existence is righteous. Moreover, it also serves to justify to himself the shameful thoughts he has about his guest. Mahmut’s loneliness and cynical lack of love is dependant on the small arguments that stem from smelly feet, smoking in the lounge, and the disappearing of the pocket watch.

The social war that begins on the doorstep rages on in the house through such means. Richard Sennett, in his famous study where he remarks that since our once-lively private lives have lost their essence,
“we have been deprived of the multi-faceted relations and the bliss that we might derive of the people in our city”, [19] goes on to state that “The words ‘city’ and ‘civility’ have a common etymological root. Civility is to treat other people as strangers and is to weave a social pattern that fits this social aloofness.” [20] This conduct that Simmel calls “formally a relationship of avoidance” is, in the eyes of the contemporary sociologist Ervin Gofmann, a “civilised indifference”. Having lost the will to do good and forgotten the pleasure of seeing happy faces, Mahmut shown such a civilised indifference to Yusuf who seeks shelter in his house. Under these circumstances, Rousseau’s humanism that says, “To not love will be to hamper my life. Yet I would like to spread to the whole wide world,” [21] exists only in dreams. “While it may not be possible to be comforted, is it not a blessing to be able to say ‘I am a human, I am the guest of humanity; it is only humanity that accepts me as a guest.’?” [22] says Rousseau. Yusuf cannot say “it is only humanity that accepts me as a guest,” not only because he does not see such a humanity before him, but also since he is deprived of the ability to grasp the actual “state of humanity” that denies him of hospitable humanity. On the other hand, Mahmut cannot say “I have humanity as my guest,” because he is not in a state to realise (or accept) the “state of humanity” which forced Yusuf to take residence in his house. Ultimately, neither
Mahmut nor Yusuf are able to step out of the loneliness that modern life commands. Due to the social distance between them, they are both deprived of the power that will help bind their wounds, and the humane love that will console their agitated souls.

This situation is a manifestation of what Marx saw in the bourgeois society as an irreconcilable conflict in social life. As Marx insists, this conflict is not individual, but “a conflict arising from the social existence conditions of individuals.” [23] Mahmut has to show lack of love and indifference to his guest from the town due to his personal social existence and situation. Because of exactly the same reasons, Yusuf has to be disturbing toward his host. The “conflict” between them ultimately arises from this factor: the advertisement-photographer Mahmut and the unemployed Yusuf. From the moment they met, “the coincidences wished for become imaginary, and the real obstacles grew.” [24] The coincidences that Yusuf hoped would find him had become imaginary after a couple of days in offices where he was not welcome and in bleak tea-houses. On the other hand, the obstacles in Mahmut’s inner circle were growing day by day through his smelly feet, cigarette, and secretive phone calls. Mahmut had already given up the aspirations of being a film maker or a photographer, and had grew painfully accustomed
to his obstacles like an unsuccessful marriage, unmet sexual demands and the fact that he has to photograph dreary pieces of ceramic for a living.

The “social existence conditions” (composed of coincidences becoming imaginary and real obstacles growing), that made Mahmut indifferent toward Yusuf and made the duo grapple continuously, were founded on the ground laid out by modern city life. As Engels had realised in the 1840s, the fact that human souls become impoverished and lose love for each other exists in the humours of the life that we lead. Similarly, Marx had noted that loveless egocentricity was a fundamental form of relation in the modern bourgeois society: “Every man tries to force another into a new sacrifice, bring him under a new dependency, exploit a new benefit and through these ... create a new form of need. In order to satisfy their selfish needs, everyone strives to create an alien essential force that gains supremacy over other people. ... Every need is an opportunity to approach a neighbour with the kindest attitude to say: Dear friend, I will give you what you must have. But you know the condition; you know with which ink you will sign the agreement that binds you to me; as I give pleasure to you, I will rip you off.” [25]

With the Crowd, Within the Crowd
“Civility is an activity that protects people from one another, yet makes one feel pleased by another’s company. (...) The objective of civility is to protect others from being crushed under their own weight.” [26] When considering that social entity that makes everyone interact with one another for the purpose of “satisfying their selfish needs”, and that stays intact to our -and Engels’- surprise despite its inhuman consequences, can we not but agree to this definition of civility by Sennett? Naturally, defining civility in this fashion also clarifies what incivility is: “Incivility is lading oneself on others.” [27] While that may be correct without a doubt, nobody would do this because of a parasitic character. The driving force behind this is what Simmel called “one of the most fundamental forms of true socialising” and what Marx formulated as to “force another into a new sacrifice, bring him under a new dependency”; in other words, it is the “blunting of the socialising skill”. [28] A “secretive” society that deems privacy and individualism untouchable aggravates the incivility between its people. In such a social structure, one man’s expressing his emotions to another has become destructive. [29] The ideology of privacy that draws ever further from initiating the sense of fraternity is “not demanding the outer world to change, but demanding to be left alone by that world.” [30]

There is a distinct difference between the “demand
to be left alone” and the “wish to be alone” that Sennett clarifies and we observe in *Uzak* (portrayed in a relationship free of the bonds of fraternity, and where expressed emotions are destructive). How? Let us confer Rousseau, who says, “I can find comfort where there is no trace of humanity as if I am in a shelter that protects me from their wrath.” [31] “When I leave my house, I seek the countryside and solitude. But I have to cover vast distances to find these. Before I can breathe deep and find solitude, I see so many heart-breaking things that half my day is spent in worries. It is a blessing if I can reach the place I seek. The moments that I evade the crowd of evil humans are very sweet, and when I find myself on a meadow amidst trees, I feel as if I am in paradise and that I am the happiest man in the world.” [32] On the contrary, Rousseau also expresses that, “...when I believe that a person with the power to turn all my wishes into reality and the will to do everything will not betray me, what could I possibly ask of him? Only this: Seeing everyone happy. What will give me eternal bliss is the happiness of everyone, and I would have no other concern but to strive to create this happiness.” [33] Let us note again; these words are by Rousseau, who just said, “I can find comfort where there is no trace of humanity as if I am in a shelter that protects me from their wrath.” Rousseau also says that he is “at an age that I can still taste the sweetness of social life despite
humans.” Despite humans!

Despite his will to escape and the wish to be alone, Rousseau always has a soft side toward the masses and social life, because he always visualises himself among drifters, the homeless, and the poor; he creates his existence within the existence of masses. Therefore, his wish to remain alone is very different from Sennett’s criticism of the “demand to be left alone” in the secretive society. Rousseau’s loneliness represents “demanding the outer world to change”, not “to be left alone by the outer world”.

Although there are many aspects of humanity, or masses, to complain about, it is still an inexhaustible resource for life. This is why Rousseau would say, “There is nothing which I have learned whilst living among humans that I would not wish for were I to be marooned on a desolate island where I was to live my days through.” [34] What Rousseau says in the beginning for the hated people that have condemned him to loneliness is also significant: “I could have loved them even if they did not want to; they have avoided my love only by losing their humanity.” [35] We might think that Mahmut, who, despite living in the heart of Istanbul, is frequently shown sitting alone on a bench by the shore, feels to be “in a shelter that protects him from the wrath of humanity”, as
Rousseau, living in the heart of Paris, felt. But he, unlike Rousseau, is not in a state to perceive social life from the reality of his situation, and to be able to embrace it by the power of this perception. This is the anthropological difference between an 18 century man and a 21 century man. Stemming from the inability to perceive social life “from the awareness of one’s own reality” has led Mahmut, who, unlike Rousseau who knew he was a human among humans, lives his uncanny individuality as a privilege against people, to an undoubted detachment from the society and social life. It is again because of this anthropological difference that today, “the major withdrawal of a person from the true social communication results in an ability to see the outer world not in its entire riches, but through the limited view of his position in the real world.” Consequently, “...the surrender of a person taking shelter in his private life taking place in his own small world to the existing social life form does not help the modern man emancipate himself, but leads him to demand freedom from his given society, and to be content with it. Meanwhile, his private world that he seeks shelter in becomes a medium of hiding and belligerence; the relations he initiates with men whom share his defeated fate do not suffice to let him achieve what his life in the real society, of which he could not get rid of, did not provide.” [36]
Mahmut’s loveless attitude toward Yusuf, the small battles that take place between them, his shouting, reprimanding, going to the same bar, sitting at the same table, always alone; his alienation and unhappiness are all indicative of such a defeated world. As public and private lives lost their qualities in the way that Sennett expressed, the real world of the outside has assumed full and unrelenting control of the inner “defeated world”. Jameson said that a “fundamental element in architecture”, namely, the “separation between the interior and exterior” was now “diminished”. “As such,” stated Jameson, “the streets of an earlier time now make up the corridors of a large shop.” [37] This suggestion about the “form” of the location seems true, as it were, for its “content” as well: the loss of the “separation between the interior and exterior” is also correct in abstract terms. What Jameson calls “residential shells”, our architectural shelters, contain the violence of the street in absolute privacy. The social war that rages between the “ones who abode by everything due to their humility, weakness or apathy”, and the “ones who were bent on making them suffer everything” carries on under a roof, in a cosy atmosphere, between two men who eat each other like crabs or spiders.

Mahmut had been defeated before life and his aspirations. But by showing lack of love toward and
grappling with his guest from the town, he was depriving himself of something which he could use to console himself after this defeat. We face the same threat. In order to resist against emotional isolation from the people with whom we share urban life in close quarters, piled on top of each other, we have to realise that which has been proved in Rousseau’s humanist loneliness; that what has changed the world to date and what will change it in the future is not “the reason left alone”, but the reason that is emancipated from all dominant ethics and ideologies of the time, and has embraced the forward-moving sects of the society. In other words, we should be able to say what Nazim Hikmet has said: “I have moved through the shifting crowds / Together with the shifting crowds.” [38]

As a romanticist member of the Frankfurt School, Benjamin writes on the last pages of the diary he kept on his visit to Moscow during December 1926 and January 1927: “For one from Moscow, Berlin is a ghost city. The people on the street must look hopelessly isolated from each other; each and every person is far, far away from the other and is alone in the middle of the wide avenue.” [39] Why should Berlin in the 1920s be a “ghost city” for someone from Moscow? Benjamin makes this statement after he observes the human effort to establish an emancipated world against the unequal world. He
was speaking with the “acquired disposition” that he said to be “the most certain consequence of time spent in Moscow”, and this new disposition had taught him to “observe Europe with the awareness of what is happening in Russia”. It is this awareness that makes him see Berlin, his hometown, as a “ghost city”. He realises that a living city does not belong to individuals content with their defeated world, but to those who insist on the demand of total emancipation, and live the excitement of establishing a new life. It is a city where the individual reason, not allowed to remain alone, moves “among the crowd, with the crowd”. In such a city, people could not have wandered around, totally isolated from one another. In such a city, there would be no “loneliness”.
Footnotes

1. Balzac; Père Goriot.


3. Friedrich Engels; op. cit.

4. Karl Marx; Capital.

5. Balzac; op. cit.

6. In Mithat Cemal Kuntay's Üç Istanbul, this standpoint comes alive with a striking expression: the conquered and unconquered Istanbul! The novel's protagonist Adnan takes the following notes for the book he intends to write: "The leaden domes of the mosques are the helmets of the conquering armies! The Süleymaniye Mosque is a ragged mountain that even the most beastly of giants cannot tackle. Its dome is a roof under which a nation awakens. Istanbul was ours the day Süleymaniye was built. And there is the other Istanbul: Beyoglu. The white buildings that resemble the rise of a bloodless soil... The streets that show off mud and scoff at stones as
newcomers... These houses, where a different act of street theatre is staged everyday... Beyoglu is the unconquered Istanbul." (Üç Istanbul, Sander Yayinlari 1976, p.75, 76.)

7. Georg Simmel; The Metropolis and Mental Life.

8. Georg Simmel; *op. cit.*

9. Georg Simmel; *op. cit.*

10. Rousseau; Reveries of the Solitary Walker..

11. Rousseau; *op. cit.*, p.16.


13. Dostoyevsky; Notes from Underground.

14. The correct question is this: Why does a denizen of St. Petersburg in the 19th century has a will,
albeit small, of rebellion and try to realise that, while a denizen of Istanbul in the 21st century cannot do likewise? Has he not the courage to confront? Çetin Altan once said that, "We do not have a tradition of duelling, we ambush." Connecting the lassitude and cynicism of a film character to this attribute, and deriving a generalisation from this can only be considered speculation. Nevertheless, we have a fund of experience that might render this possible: even if we were to indulge in some form of individual rebellion, we would not do it through an honest, courageous confrontation, but employ traps, ambushes, fakes, glitches, etc.

15. Walter Benjamin; The Arcades Project.


18. Walter Benjamin; One-Way Street.


22. Rousseau; op. cit., p. 135.

23. Karl Marx; Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy.


25. Karl Marx; Manuscripts of 1844.


31. Rousseau; op. cit., p. 103.

32. Rousseau; op. cit., p. 119.

33. Rousseau; op. cit., p. 86.

34. Rousseau; op. cit., p. 33.

35. Rousseau; op. cit., p. 11.

36. Ünsal Oskay; Kitle İletisiminin Kültürel Islevleri [The Cultural Functions of Mass Communication], Der Yayınları 1993, p. 344.

37. Fredric Jameson; Postmodernism.

39. Walter Benjamin; Moscow Diary. Benjamin's diary is intriguing not in the sense that it documents a painful period marked by his love - starting with optimistic expectations and ending in vicious disappointments- to the Bolshevikist actress Asja Lacis, but because it is the sincere observations of an "unconnected", but decent and honest intellectual about the socialist experience.