



Installation

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To emphasize “the central role of [hu]mankind in geology and ecology,” Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer proposed the term *Anthropocene* in 2000 for the present interglacial era known as the Holocene.¹ Implicit in the Anthropocene concept is an emphasis on uncertainty and unpredictability brought about by the overwhelming impact of detrimental human activities on planetary ecosystems. As Timothy Clark affirms, “The Anthropocene could be called . . . an effect of radical and unpredictable emergence in the condition of the world.”² Understandably, cataclysmic future scenarios are imagined for an almost unlivable Earth, our home. In this context, finding “figures of hope” may be difficult but not impossible.³ Hence the term *installation*. I find potential for hope in installation as a temporary, site-specific form of art practice that problematizes the dominant tendency to see the Anthropocene in apocalyptic terms. *Installation*, in other words, opens a space to rethink the Anthropocene in terms of affective empathy for the Earth. To illustrate, I have chosen to reflect here on *E-Motions*, by the Turkish psychiatrist and artist Rahşan Düren, which confronts the Anthropocene thesis by bringing our emotions and motions together.⁴

In its typical etymological sense, *installation* refers to emplacement and settlement, but to install also means to invest, which suggests hope and promise in this age of *anthropos*, the universalized human agency as an epochal geo-force. Thinking with installation as part of the emerging Anthropocene lexis problematizes such a totalizing categorization of humanity and reinstalls the subjects of the Anthropocene in the environmental imagination as *anthropoi*—plural humans,⁵ with their multiple and

1. Crutzen and Stoermer, “Anthropocene,” 17.

2. Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 47. See also Oppermann and Iovino, “Introduction”; Alaimo, *Exposed* (see chap. 6, “Your Shell on Acid,” 143–68); Morton, *Dark Ecology*; Gibson, Rose, and Fincher, *Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene*; and Zylinska, *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*.

3. Kirksey, “Hope,” 296.

4. Rahşan Düren, *E-Motions*, October 2015, rahsandurenhaydarpasa.com/eng/ (hereafter Düren).

5. Oppermann and Iovino, “Introduction,” 12.

overlapping histories of love, strife, loss, fear, and survival. Art installations that play with these meanings raise questions about what it means to be settled in a changing place while paradoxically feeling displaced.⁶ When envisioned from the perspective of the aesthetic encounters of art and the Anthropocene, installation produces aesthetic sensibilities about whether human beings can imagine less destructive ways of interacting with the world.

With its double meanings of emplacement and investment, installation expresses the hope that if we invest in changing our perceptions and ourselves, we can, as Kayla Anderson puts it, “fit the changing demands of the ecological and biological world we inhabit.”⁷ In this regard, installation enacts an aspect of Bruce Carroll’s argument on ecological consciousness, being “a deliberate attempt at re-directing our thinking about our habitat, about how we conceive of that habitat.”⁸ In aesthetic terms, then, installation contains geo- and biocultural meanings of changing habitats due to anthropogenic effects and processes.

Reflecting on the transience of life on an increasingly volatile planet, art installations propose, as Donna Haraway observes, “fundamental questions about extinction and survival and response,” fostering “publics that learn to care, to make a difference.”⁹ In reimagining the Anthropocene to this end, art installations can install and then subvert its anthropocentric characterization by retrieving a note of hope for conserving ecological equilibrium amid the dissonant horizon of disturbed ecologies and by reinscribing promise in the cultural imaginary to recuperate Earth, our home. Düren’s *E-Motions* conveys such a message in Haydarpasha, the iconic but now ghostly train station in Istanbul’s Asian side, located right by the sea where the continent ends.

There are no travelers in this defunct old station; instead, the whispers of the past permeate empty spaces, and echoes of the Orient Express bounce back from gracefully embroidered domes. Ghostly pirouettes of the West and the East appear before instantly vanishing into the shadows again while witty seagulls and curious cats become witness to the station’s solitary stories. Standing here feels like being poised at the threshold of the Anthropocene epoch: you want to reflect on its distressing silences and losses as can be observed right here in the Sea of Marmara. Gone now are swordfish, blue tuna, sturgeon, and turbot, whose poignant stories lay bare “some of the complex cross-weaves of vulnerability and culpability that exist between us and other species.”¹⁰ Here the transcendent perspective of the Anthropocene is vibrant in the air, but there is also

6. For a discussion of how art installations “include experiments in . . . displacement, and emplacement,” see chap. 4 of Ran, *History of Installation Art*, 61.

7. Anderson, “Ethics, Ecology, and the Future,” 344.

8. Carroll, “Role for Art in Ecological Thought,” 149.

9. Haraway, “Donna Haraway in Conversation with Martha Kenney,” 264. Haraway here is referring to the crochet coral reef project, which brought together seven thousand people in twenty-five locations to crochet coral reefs. Their work is produced as installations in different places.

10. MacFarlane, “Anthropocene.”

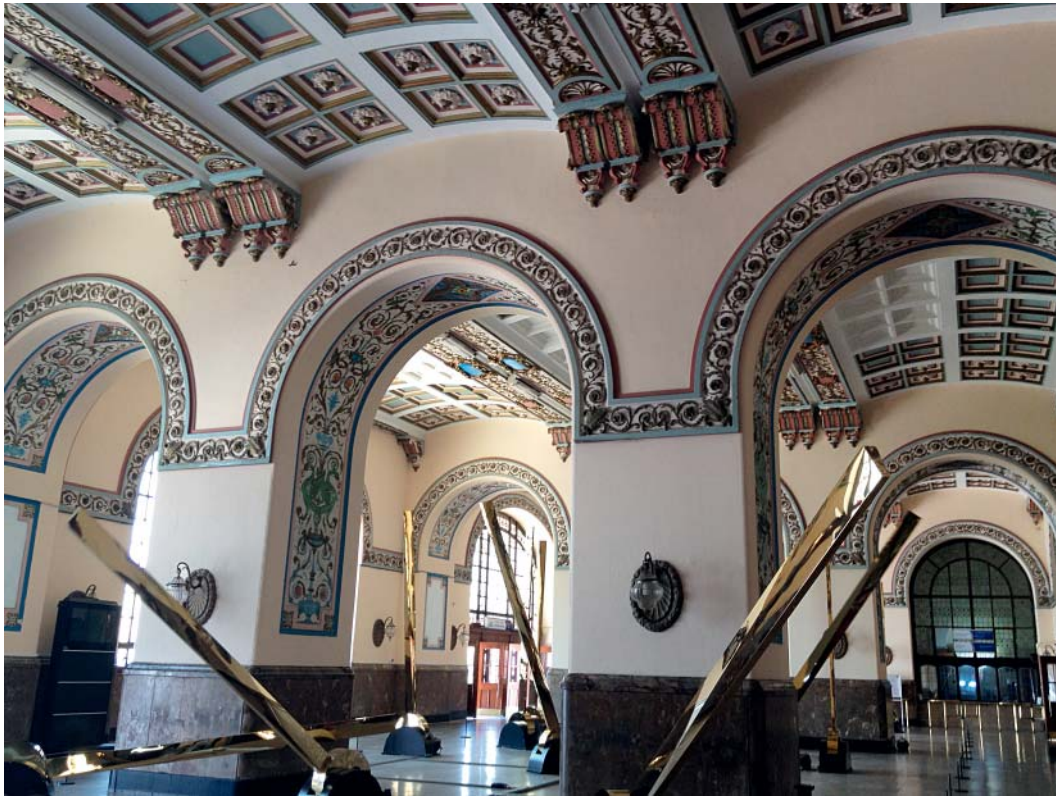


Figure 1. *E-Motions*, Haydarpasha, Rahşan Düren, 2015. Photo by Serpil Oppermann

something corporeally proximal, revealing the Anthropocene's impure vibrations, its disenchanted pirouettes, its miasma, and its small moments, all through an art installation.

Installed in Haydarpasha's Waiting Lounge in October 2015, *E-Motions* consist of twenty golden dials "synchronized with servo step engines producing complex and irregular movements with precision positioning," as stated on the *E-Motions* website¹¹ (fig. 1). The irregular movements of these dials are accompanied by sound recordings and light projections. Seven different choreographies installed in the software of the system perform a posthuman dance in strange rhythms with the waves splashing onto the ancient stones beyond Haydarpasha's elegant walls. Moving like the waves, the dials arouse intense feelings of abandonment in the solitude of Haydarpasha, evoking a sense of a dynamic relation between motions and emotions in the perception of the viewer. I myself felt this way because in such a melancholic atmosphere one is left to surmise about the affective influence of unjustifiable human actions. Since our emotions strangely attune to the dials' haunting motion, experiencing this installation is indeed purely *e-motional*. It makes us ponder what it means to *feel* installed in the Anthropocene while moving in it as if we are not.

11. Düren.

What turns *E-Motions* into a form of Anthropocene awareness is the plaintive tale it tells to capture the small moments of sadness embedded in the Anthropocene itself. This tale contests the hubristic visions of the Anthropocene phenomena in which humanity remains a major geologic force for many millennia. The oversize gold-plated dials start moving with the switch of a button, implying that the human is in control; but at the same time, they seem to obfuscate human presence in quite an ironic way. Indeed, the absence of humans in this choreography is an ironic homage to the *anthropos* as a catastrophic planetary agency doomed to bring about its own end.

Read as a careful meditation on loss and promise, *E-Motions* actually disrupts and restructures the familiar Anthropocene narratives by creating an ironic context in which emotions must be balanced with motions in a responsible way. There is sadness here, but the message is that the environmental fate is not sealed. As long as the dials move, they generate the feeling of homely emplacement; yet the question, what if humans “flip the switch”? is also unavoidable, putting the valuing of the term *installation* as “emplacement,” or “sitting place,” under critical pressure.

Despite this tension, however, installations generate hope for a more emotional relationship with the planet, creating strong sensory and affective experiences. They engage our empathy to “invest” in the disanthropocentric meanings of the Anthropocene so that we can perhaps eliminate some of its anthropogenic manifestations. In other words, *installation* communicates a message of revaluing what we may lose as illustrated by *E-Motions* in Haydarpasha, a symbolic epitome of our home becoming dysfunctional. *E-Motions* not only forces visitors to inhabit this desolate world in a moment of affective pause from their daily routines but also urges them to embody the hope and sadness of the Anthropocene and what it might mean for the future of our own and many other species.

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