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# CLIMATE

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## GENIES AND FAIRIES WILL SAVE US

One and a half degrees. Beyond giving birbuçuk its name, this number is a political and philosophical threshold. Remaining below it demands radical systemic transformation. Exceeding it means managed retreat for the wealthy and catastrophe for the majority. This framing envelops the entire session.

"The only solution, they say, is negative emissions. Just think – it's no different from saying genies and fairies will save us."

Promises of technological solutions are, in reality, steps on the path to 4–5 degrees of warming. Negative emissions technology, green growth, carbon capture – all are continuations of the same modernist logic: seeking solutions through the instruments of the very system that generates the problem, without questioning the system itself. But the climate question reaches far beyond environmental protection. It means engaging with everything the industrial system has brought down upon us – and doing that without political struggle, without organisation, is impossible.

Green politics is not an option but a necessity. It differs from pure environmentalism or traditional left politics – it demands thinking together about ecological necessity, social justice, democratic participation and systemic transformation. Without a holistic perspective, none of these questions can be addressed.

But where you come from, where you stand, also matters. Different intellectual genealogies produce different ecologies. Anglo-Saxon ecocriticism, European Green movements, the political ecology tradition after 2000, Turkey's own particular context – the anti-nuclear movement, Gezi, specific local struggles – all draw from different sources. There is no universal environmentalism. Between the tradition of John Muir and that of Ivan Illich, between Rudolf Bahro's German Greens and Turkey's 1990s environmentalism, there are deep differences. Recognising those differences is the precondition for real dialogue – not a matter of right and wrong, but of where, when and with whom thought takes shape.

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## WINNING SLOWLY IS LOSING

A voice from within climate activism confronts a bitter truth: in the climate struggle, winning slowly is equivalent to losing. The disappointment at the COP summit in Copenhagen – the massive police presence, the dramatic march, the negotiating table that collapsed at the end – marks the breaking point of a passage from naive hope to strategic realism.

"A shift occurs in strategy: from consumption-focused approaches to the struggle to keep fossil fuels in the ground. From the demand side to the supply side. From individual choices to acts of infrastructure disruption. Civil disobedience is the name of the new language."

The Global Power Shift experience – training six hundred climate activists from 136 countries in Istanbul over a week – offers a model of what movement-building can look like. Organisers and funding then spread to more than eighty countries. Coal mine blockades, oil infrastructure interruptions – cutting supply is a more direct intervention than managing demand. Environmental justice mapping projects render visible which communities bear the ecological cost of economic growth, who owns the resources, who profits, who suffers. Political ecology working

groups, global environmental justice atlases – these are tools that connect local resistance to global patterns.

But a tension remains: between these international networks and the forty to fifty local struggles ongoing in Turkey's own geography – village-level fights against dams, hydroelectric projects, mining operations – how can a connection be made? Intellectual circles and village resistances are largely disconnected from one another. Struggles against mining in Bergama, against hydroelectric projects in Artvin, against coal expansion in Yatağan, against planned power stations near the temple of Lagina – each continues on its own. Moments of connection – the campaign against the Akkuyu nuclear plant, Bergama – are brief and rare.

Why so fragmented? How can organised resistance be linked together? How can intellectual and artistic production approach village-level struggle without appropriating or misrepresenting it? It is necessary to move beyond pure opposition – perpetual refusal – and produce alternative frameworks. Green politics distinguishes itself from mere green activism precisely by its capacity to develop this affirmative political vision.

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### IF THIS IS THE CREATURE WE ARE TO BE

The darkest voice is the most provocative. It carries a deep anthropological pessimism about the destructiveness of the human species: if humanity is to be this kind of creature, one of those who thinks it would be very good if it disappeared.

"A significant portion of the world's population isn't actually needed. If three and a half to four billion of the seven billion were to vanish tomorrow morning, nothing in any of our lives would change."

This is not hatred but a candid reading of contemporary capitalism's own logic. Is it not human society that produced the present situation? Elite power concentration is at unprecedented levels. The Sixth Great Extinction has already begun – as the inevitable consequence of human civilisation. Nothing actually happens to nature – what we are destroying are the conditions of existence of a living species. The "Spaceship Earth" notion is insufficient; the problem is not individual behaviour but the structure of civilisation. The human being's relationship with nature is egocentric – it separates itself from nature, separates its culture from nature, always has.

But this pessimism does not produce paralysis. On the contrary: the readiness to work against everything that might accelerate extinction arises not from hope but from ethical necessity. To continue without any guarantee of success – because continuing is necessary. This is a deposit carried by the pre-1980 left intellectual generation: the experience of defeat after the coup, connections with the German Green movement, lines of struggle run separately and together with feminists, ecologists, socialists.

Documentary practice is a form of witnessing and critical engagement. Aesthetic and poetic modes of communication stand alongside analytical ones. This voice – which has participated in environmental campaigns but has never positioned itself as an environmental expert – carries the freedom of looking from outside the movement.

Thoreau's Walden experiment is recalled as a practice of appropriate scale. The Club of Rome reports, Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction*, Harari's reading of the human species – all converge on the same point: neither technological utopianism nor naive environmentalism is sufficient.

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### WITHOUT SOIL THERE IS NO CULTURE

An architect-curator begins by questioning terminology itself. The word "nature" is entirely a concept of our own invention. Fernando Pessoa's formulation is sharp: "Nature is a disease of our heads." The separation of human from nature is the problem itself – not the solution.

"Kaide in Turkish is a word that sits beautifully in the language. Kaide means base, but it also means rule. And we defined the rule as follows: without soil there is no agriculture, without agriculture there is no city, without a city there is no culture."

The Kaide project – 50x150x50 cm soil modules installed near Taksim, beside Gezi Park – invites farmers, poets, collectors, musicians to produce with soil. It shakes the assumptions around urban agriculture. Soil is not a raw material but a mode of relationship. To place the human being at the centre as both subject and object – but to prompt the thought, for even a moment, that one is not at the centre of everything.

The Aşı (Graft) exhibition examines the dams on the Euphrates and Tigris – using the metaphor of grafting to connect ecological and political transformation. "Who gives us the right to build a wall across the river?" is not a technical question but an ontological one. The Hepbahar project investigates seed dormancy – questioning the limits of forced production in greenhouses with artificial light spectra, questioning intervention in natural cycles. Technology is very tempting for us: we can change something, we can build a beautiful dam against nature – "Look what I've done." But this enchantment is a form of domination.

An encounter with Kayapo indigenous leaders in Paris transforms thinking at its foundation. The indigenous leader's reaction in the Natural History Museum: "There are only dead things here. Where we come from, nature is alive, relational, participatory." We live together with them, we are one with them and the wholeness – that wholeness strikes you. We see once again how false a thing we have made. The Western knowledge system is built on converting living relationships into dead collections. This epistemological violence lies at the very heart of the ecological crisis.

## MUSEUMS AND DEAD KNOWLEDGE

Museums possess an extraordinary opportunity – everyone from the youngest to the oldest sees them as trustworthy repositories of knowledge. But current museum practice suppresses ecological consciousness more than it produces it. There is no natural history museum in Turkey – a fundamental institutional gap. The museums that exist are "boutique" – not real institutions.

"I can't wander through a museum without a lump in my throat, without going through phases of dizziness and stumbling. I can't wander there at all. Because there are only dead things."

Ecocritical museology proposes rethinking not only natural history museums but all museums. The museum can cease to be a place that presents content about the environment and become an institution that fundamentally questions the mode of producing knowledge and consciousness. Models of ecological democracy – commons-based governance, non-hierarchical decision-making, local autonomy – can be adapted to museum practice.

The influence of Bruno Latour, the ecological democracy framework of Dominique Bourg and Kerry Whiteside, participatory and co-creative museum practices – all are part of an effort to shift knowledge production from academic extractivism to a community-centred practice. International examples such as the Nevada Museum of Art's Art + Environment initiative of 2009, international networks of ecological museum practitioners – these are structures that do not yet have equivalents in Turkey but should.

The concept of the Anthropocene is also discussed – the geological epoch defined by human domination. The critique is clear: which humans? Which anthropos? It carries a false universalism, conceals power differentials, can erase indigenous alternatives. But naming the current crisis is simultaneously necessary. Museum exhibitions increasingly address the Anthropocene – whether and how they can do so responsibly remains an open question.

## THE LIMIT OF LANGUAGE, THE LIMIT OF THOUGHT

One of the session's deepest tensions concerns language. The words we use to discuss the environment and ecology – "nature," "environment," "conservation," "preservation" – carry problematic assumptions. "Nature" implies something separate from the human; the perspective that says "there is no nature, there are trees, there are sheep" refuses this abstraction. "Environment" turns the world into something wrapped around the human being. Scientific terminology creates distance between the expert and the public. Museum language – Anthropocene, conservation, preservation – all carry problematic assumptions.

There is a dual task: the critique of inherited terminology and the creation of new words rooted in specific places and relationships. Not as romantic primitivism but as epistemological necessity. The distinction between first nature and artificial nature collapses – all contemporary nature is mediated by climate change, pollution, human design. But humans too are part of nature; our interventions can be relational rather than dominating. Grafting – as a metaphor for non-violent technological intervention – contrasts with damming and mining and extractivism.

"The relationship that Alevi people of Dersim establish with soil, mountain and water through the figure of Hızır cannot be captured by the language of 'conservation' – but it encodes sophisticated ecological knowledge. The sacred dimension suppressed by secular environmentalism surfaces precisely here."

How monotheistic religions changed our relationship to place is discussed: Pan dies, sacred nature is commodified, opened for human use. But there is no naive return to religion here. To rediscover sacred relationality through new/old practices – a dimension of reverence, care, respect that exceeds calculation is required. When environmental ethics is reduced to pure calculation, to resource management, it destroys the very relationship it is supposed to protect.

The Gamo farmers' principle is recalled: take what you need, never take more. The Dogon people's Gaia consciousness – direct communication with the Earth as a living, relational being. These are not metaphorical but ontological claims. Michel Serres's thought offers a philosophical framework for this relationality.

Children's temporal experience is also connected to this discussion. Beings who have come into the world in a way that we ourselves initiated, beings who inhabit our home, beings we supposedly educate – they live in a different time. A bodily, relational, present-rooted temporality, different from the linear time of adults. The climate crisis is also a disruption of temporal regimes. New modes of existence include new modes of temporal becoming.

## FRIENDSHIP IS AN INFRASTRUCTURE

Perhaps the session's most unexpected discovery is the rediscovery of friendship as a political form. Ivan Illich's concept of *philia* – love/friendship for the other, a relationality extending to non-human others – comes to occupy the centre of the discussion.

"We have so mechanised this matter, taken it to such a scientific, mechanical, academic and even professional point that... it seems to me we have become severed from the thing itself."

Professionalisation has mechanised Turkey's climate and environmental movement. The organic relationships of the beginning – relationships grounded in friendship and shared commitment that generated spontaneous creativity – have been converted into symposium formats, funding cycles, career-building. The period 2009–2013 produced significant campaigns based on personal relationships, spontaneous creativity, real friendship. But the institutionalisation that followed lost the creative productive capacity; the movement retreated to a defensive position.

The Gezi moment was an example of organic genesis – the professionalisation that followed was a loss. Artists and writers also receive their share of this disconnection. They are willing to sign solidarity declarations but not to do substantive work. There are structural reasons: institutional pressures, market logic, professionalisation. And yet literature and art can be epistemological sources, not merely vehicles of communication. Aesthetic experience can

disrupt inherited modes of thinking and perceiving.

The German Green movement drew deeply from the Romantic artistic tradition – this connection remains meaningful. But there is also the need to speak of corrupted love. The excessive love we feel for those most like us, those we agree with too well – nationalism, religious communalism, familial exclusivity – produces the Other.

Real philia, on the other hand, is love for difference: the capacity to be transformed in the encounter with the other, friendship across borders. The struggle to protect the Yedikule Gardens succeeds through "acquaintance" – face-to-face recognition, not formal membership. Professional/institutional logic creates fragility; friendship-based networks are more resilient.

The thought of Hardt and Negri, Illich's concept of philia, the parable of the Good Samaritan – all converge on the same point: ethical relationality is the precondition for genuine ecological politics.

"The parable of the Good Samaritan is recalled: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' – not as a command but as an invitation to recognise shared humanity and vulnerability across difference."

## WORKING IN THE DARK

A spectrum of pessimism and hope opens across the session. At the darkest end, the inevitability of the Sixth Extinction. At the scientific-strategic end, the radical transformation demanded by the 1.5-degree target. At the activist end, the building of momentum through civil disobedience and local organising. At the hopeful-critical end, small-scale participatory projects and ecocritical museum work.

Wallerstein's observation is recalled: capitalism is dying – in its terminal phase – but what will replace it has yet to be determined. This is a period of maximum danger but also maximum possibility. A chaotic, violent transition is inevitable, but alternatives can be actively constructed – waiting is not sufficient.

The distinction is vital between false hope – neoliberal "solutions," technological fixes, individual consumer choices – and grounded hope – building real alternatives, practising different relationships, expanding spaces of autonomy. Ecological democracy, post-capitalist futures – these are not predictions but active constructions. Commons-based governance, non-hierarchical decision-making, local autonomy combined with translocal coordination, the inclusion of non-human others – these are not utopia but practical necessities.

This birbuçuk session is itself an attempt to reconstruct organic, friendship-based intellectual practice after the period of professionalisation. It models what post-neoliberal intellectual life might look like: grounded in real relationships, crossing disciplinary boundaries, rooted in concrete struggle, unafraid of pessimism and fundamental questions. With this series of sessions, birbuçuk does precisely this – climate scientist, environmental activist, documentary filmmaker, architect-curator, museum practitioner at the same table, with the same question: how can we do things differently? There is also a need to register what is absent: the voice of the working class and impoverished communities, the discussion of concrete economic alternatives, Islamic ecological thought, direct representatives from rural resistance movements – all are missing, and the session is aware of their absence. An honest assessment also sees what is not there.

Most importantly: the conversation does not resolve, it deepens. Participants are uncertain about what the next steps are – but more aware of what is at stake. The one-and-a-half-degree target creates urgency without reproducing the logic of panic. The emphasis on friendship and philia offers an alternative to both exhausted cynicism and forced optimism. This is intellectual honesty, and it is a political necessity.