MINING

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THE FETISHISM OF GROWTH

Mining, coal, energy, construction, gold. Behind all of them is the same drive: to convert into money quickly. To generate energy quickly. To build buildings, roads, airports quickly. Behind this drive lies a serious fetishism of growth — an ideology that regards economic growth as necessary, natural and good. To question growth is branded as naivety or betrayal. Yet growth serves particular interests — corporations, contractors, the state — while distributing its costs to others: workers, communities, ecosystems.

> "Behind all of this there is a serious fetishism of growth."

Environmental problems do not arise from the absence of market prices — that is a reductive and naive view. The problem lies in conflicts between winners and losers, in collective action failures, in power asymmetries. Ecological economics places not pricing but power relations and politics at the centre. Extractivism extends beyond mining: the enormous extraction of sand for construction, geothermal energy consumption, agricultural collapse, fishing, forestry. In Turkey, geothermal energy is the fastest-growing energy sector — labelled as "clean energy," but companies discharge heated steam into rivers and the air rather than re-injecting it underground.

The discourse of an energy deficit is also a mystification. Official figures show an energy surplus; the deficit is an artificial construction, legitimised by the ideology of growth. The rhetoric of "we need energy" masks the real question: energy for whom? Energy for what? It is not individual users who consume most of the electricity, but concrete plants, shopping centres, the energy of construction. But neoliberal framing shifts responsibility onto the individual: "If you're against mining, don't use electricity."

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF RESISTANCE

To understand Artvin's place in Turkey's mining resistance, one must look at the struggle that has continued since 1993. Approximately 300 mining licences are active in the province. Cerattepe — the mountain adjacent to the city centre — is the most contested site. If Artvin were Istanbul, Cerattepe would be Taksim.

> "Imagine where we are as Artvin. And imagine the mining site as Taksim. That, really, is the whole matter."

There are three reasons for Artvin's disproportionate visibility. First, a powerful diaspora network: wherever Artvin people have migrated — Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Antalya, Muğla — they mobilise for the affairs of their homeland there. This geographically dispersed network creates an amplification capacity that purely local movements cannot achieve. Second, more than twenty-five years of organised local resistance: house-by-house organising, the rejection of three mining companies, two lawsuits won. Third, a multi-pronged strategy — academic analysis, legal struggle, media presence, artistic and cultural intervention, direct action, international solidarity. When any one of these is absent, the whole structure weakens.

The process that led to the Anadolu Group's withdrawal from a three-million-dollar investment in Gerze became possible through a synergy combining the intellectual left, a people's choir, legal work and media — described as the largest such success in Turkey in this field.

But activism is also a story of personal transformation. Someone who has lost their Laz language, who returns to their hometown every summer, who was not a fourth-generation miner, learns under the pressure of circumstances: Photoshop (for protest posters), video editing, kemençe (for cultural documentation). "Conditions forced me. I didn't want to. They turned me into this." The editor, designer, musician of Artvin Yerel is all the same person — because resistance requires being multidimensional.

The Eastern Black Sea "Master Plan" — presented as a tourism route but actually a map of energy, mining and hydroelectric extraction — is explained by the green roads: nine metres wide, claimed to be built for tourists but in reality traversed by haul trucks. Fatsa is Turkey's largest hazelnut market; the surrounding fields have been stripped by mining, quality has fallen, Italian markets are refusing the product.

THE KILLER'S NAME

Media routinely conceals company names in mining accidents. We often do not know the names of those who died — but we also do not know the names of the killers. Disclosure — naming companies, mapping ownership structures, identifying decision-makers — is a political practice.

> "I think it might be easy not to retain even a single killer's name in your memory. Look. Nothing is there."

The chasm between official statistics and reality is vast. An estimated seventy per cent of mining deaths are unregistered — settled by handshake, by blood money. Chinese workers die, are buried locally, are not recorded, disappear. An estimated seven to eight mine workers die per day, but these deaths are invisible because they are scattered.

When 301 people die at once it becomes news; one-by-one deaths pass in silence. Two villages have been submerged for a dam — Sirya (Zeytinlik), with its traditional olive cultivation, and Oruçlu. Both were relocated to new villages; then the mining roads were sought to pass through the relocated Oruçlu. The villagers: "You already took our ancestral land, submerged our fields, moved us — and now a road too?" Mountains and valleys carry embodied histories. Mining erases the layered temporal relationships people hold to place.

The elderly survive but the young migrate — thirty to forty per cent population loss — and the social fabric tears. In Bartın — in Tarlaağzı — a second Soma is approaching. Coal mining and a thermal power plant have been established in the region where a farming and fishing population lives. Children and spouses work in the mines; parents are opposed to the thermal plant.

The mining company says: "We're going to extract it anyway."

THE WOUNDS OF THE EARTH

A visual artist renders visible, through satellite photographs, the "wounds" that open-cast mines leave on the earth's surface. Each image appears as a single point on a satellite — but at ground level it is disaster-scale.

> "Colour manipulation is deliberate — to expose ecological processes. Each mine is named, data drawn from the Environmental Justice Atlas. The production process itself is 'crazy work' — materiality reflects the madness of mining."

Dead landscapes: the removal of topsoil leaves barren terrain. Toxic waste ponds: reservoirs of chemical waste. The 2015 Bento Rodrigues dam collapse in Brazil poisoned the Rio Doce for thousands of kilometres. As land mines are exhausted, extraction shifts to the ocean floor — islands like Palau sell seabed mining rights.

Oceans are designated not only as extraction sites but as carbon-dumping sites — the oceans of the future as the landfill of carbon. Contemporary art focuses intensely on political content but engages very little with environmental problems. This gap is the motivation for the work. The aesthetic beautification of catastrophe is deliberate — it catches the viewer's attention, then exposes the horror beneath.

The discomfort between "beautiful" and "toxic" is intentional. A second body of work consists of panoramas assembled from catastrophe media images — wars, burning buildings, melting glaciers. These sewn-together images create submerged worlds, bombed landscapes, apocalyptic compositions. They reference climate futures — London in ice-age conditions, for example. The transition from economics training to art is not a rupture but a different form of the effort to render visible what has been made invisible.

Infographics, diagrams, charts, photographs, video — the tools change but all pass through extensive research and archiving processes.

SOMA MEANS BODY

A dance artist argues that the body is the primary political-ecological domain. A journey that began with ballet and evolved towards somatic practice is the story of a passage from goal-oriented technical perfection to bodily awareness. The body is addressed in three separate registers: as mind, as psychology, as kinaesthetic wisdom.

> "The dancer too works in a dark environment to extract the ore within themselves. The miner too works underground. To reach an ore they do not know."

Mining and dance are structurally identical: both extract value from bodies, both rapidly consume bodies, both rank high in "worst jobs" lists. The miner descends underground seeking ore; the dancer works in the dark seeking truth. The spaces where both come together are called "salon." The connection with Soma is established through an accidental discovery.

An artist who travels to Çanakkale for a theatre workshop meets a mining engineer: "Can we do improvisation in the mine?" The group descends into the mine, finds a large void, performs an intense two-hour improvisation. Then the engineer reports that a high-quality silver vein has just been discovered at exactly that spot. The Soma disaster (2014) deepens this connection.

The "Worst Job" performance — miners' helmets sent from Soma, framed around labour and commemoration — is a work that has been performed repeatedly since 2016. Audiences watch from three sides and above — the performance simultaneously makes felt the distance of looking from above and the experience of being underground. But funders do not want the name Soma to appear: "Remove Soma. Don't even let the name appear." Artists are pressured into self-censorship — commemoration is politically dangerous because remembering is questioning the system. An ecological body understanding that opens from micro to macro rather than macro to micro: individual body dynamics mirror larger socio-ecological systems.

Effort, power, violence in individual movement — these are the mirror of the violence in the larger world. Bodily phenomenology grounds ecological understanding: bodies consume energy, express power, register pain. Without moving from individual body-awareness to collective body-understanding, macro-scale environmental work fails. Dance projects with diverse bodies — 150 participants, working with people labelled as disabled, dance and body-awareness workshops in prison — show that the body is not merely an individual organism but the focus of systemic oppression, resistance and ecological relation. Forced-open windows in the dance building at Mimar Sinan, struggling against toxic indoor air from nearby construction; a project for bare-foot contact with the soil — students need open air, soil contact, to function properly.

KILOMETRES OF GREY

A photographer documents the quarries on Istanbul's periphery over six months. Sixteen active quarries near the village of Cebeci lie only 200–300 metres from Alibeyköy Dam, Istanbul's water source. Dynamite blasts every day — dust clouds of 20–25 minutes, breaking windows, cracking walls.

> "Working in shades of grey is a conscious choice. Green appears only where quarry expansion has not yet reached. Excessive colour would aestheticise the destruction; monochrome documents the actual conditions while emphasising the bleakness."

But Soma is a different scale: "You travel kilometres and kilometres and kilometres. No green." Constantly burning coal — not just coal dust but active combustion. A constant haze of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide. 40,000 workers daily; the photographer works ten days and spends four or five in the infirmary. Truck tyres two to two-and-a-half metres in diameter — the scale is truly terrifying.

A journey that begins with documenting the Third Bridge extends to documenting the Third Airport, and from there to all of Istanbul's urban transformation. Istanbul's "beautiful" new areas — the Bomonti transformation, the Hilton district — rise simultaneously with the ecological collapse of the quarry zones. The city beautifies selectively while demolishing its ecological capacity. "We noticed the thing. What can we do, what can we do" — helplessness in the face of scale leads to small-scale interventions: bare-foot soil contact projects, stencil greening.

EVERYONE KNEW

In Soma the system "worked correctly." Alarm systems functioned. Everyone — workers, engineers — knew and had accepted the risk. Not individual negligence but structural tragedy. Workers "knowingly" took the risk — because there was no other option. Agriculture had been deliberately destroyed, rural populations driven to mining and construction as the only option.

> "It is something I see and feel — that neoliberal hegemony has in a sense infected all of us in some way, gnawed a little at all of our brains."

301 deaths changed national consciousness — Soma became Turkey's keyword for sacrifice and tragedy. But collective memory is fading rapidly. By the second anniversary, solidarity events had dwindled. Six other mining disasters followed, each receiving minimal attention. Deaths in double digits make news; deaths in single digits are silence. This forgetting is structural — it serves mining interests.

If commemoration is not sustained as a political practice, the system normalises forgetting. Soma itself is still active. Families live with trauma, economic devastation, grief. The complexity of mourning — 301 families, each receiving different compensation — has created fractures within the community. The mystification of the labour-nature relationship is most nakedly visible here: thermal plants burn coal, heat cities, ostensibly for citizens' welfare — but in reality for corporate profit. Workers sacrifice their health and their lives.

The rhetoric of "not going cold" masks the real distribution of power. When you say "I don't want this" without alternatives, the chance of sustaining it over the long term is low. Real resistance is not only opposing specific mines but building alternatives. Turkish agriculture has been deliberately destroyed — these people were living much more happily in agriculture twenty years ago, and then life changed.

This process that has driven rural populations to mining and construction as the only option also breaks the capacity for resistance: "My family has to live" — people know mining is destructive but economic desperation is systematically exploited. Reconstructing agricultural viability, creating economic options — resistance must include these too. Individual consumer choices are insufficient; structural transformation is necessary. The olive law — the olive tree law — stands as the only existing barrier against mining expansion in Turkey.

The mining conflicts in the Kaz Mountains repeatedly remind us of the importance of this law. This session moves towards a concrete outcome: going to Soma in the summer with a mixed team — academic, artistic, activist. No predetermined conclusion. Experimental engagement. Deliberate slowness. Sustained presence — not a one-off intervention.

Because mourning is complex: 301 families, each having received different compensation, fractures created. The event has not closed. No single discipline captures the complexity of mining on its own. Economics shows the profit motive; ecology shows the environmental cost; labour studies shows working conditions; history shows regional trajectories; art renders visible what analysis abstracts.

Effective resistance requires simultaneous multi-perspectival engagement. Walking almost every quarry and mining site in the Kaz Mountains, producing reports in Soma, conducting fieldwork from Turkmenistan to Ecuador — academic, activist and artistic domains are operated simultaneously. The mining session models how intellectual-artistic-activist collaboration works in practice: not hierarchical, not siloed, not disembodied, not resigned.

Despite documenting vast injustice, participants are committed to sustained engagement — it concludes with concrete project planning. This is working in dark times by facing the dark.