

RESISTANT ECOLOGIES: *TRANSALPIN* (CLARA NICOLAS & LÈO GATINOT, 2023)

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ransalpin, a rousing documentary short film by Clara Nicolas and Lèo Gatinot, primarily shot between October and November of 2023, offers the first transnational account of the longest running protest movement in the history of modern Italy. The No-Tav movement, born out of a period in the 1990s fraught with political upheaval, has been protesting against the construction of a high-speed train line between Turin, Italy and Lyon, France that experts have labeled environmentally catastrophic, economically injudicious, and politically undemocratic. Directors Nicolas and Gatinot demonstrate that these issues are entangled, as is the fragile alpine ecology of the affected Maurienne and Susa Valleys. While *Transalpin* asserts itself in the wake of myriad documentaries about No-Tav - for example, *La scelta* (2022), *No Tav. Gli indiani di valle* (2005), *Qui* (2015), and *La baita* (2015) - it untangles this web of issues with a strikingly unique narrative approach.

For a movement constituted of masses from every stratum of society - from biology students and Catholic priests to defense attorneys and dairy farmers - humans are nearly imperceptible in the film. Apart from a French horse-keeper, hooded and on the edge of a misty forest, the viewer is only shown distinguishable faces when

they are a part of a group. The anonymous testimonies and throngs of protestors serve to underline an ethos of collective, popular action behind grassroots movements such as No-Tav where no individual is more important than the crowd.

Water, on the other hand, is omnipresent. It is an essential life-sustaining resource to those living in and around the Valsusa, where winter ski tourism and agriculture are pillars to the local economy.



Yet, for Nicolas and Gatinot, the importance of water is also something more. Almost ethereal and beyond any pragmatism, the water from the Alps nourishes the body and soul, its countenance: vapor, liquid, and ice. In fact, the film opens with an adage of folk wisdom stating that those who drink its water will live to be one-hundred-years-old. Then there is silence for two minutes. Sublime footage of densely clouded alpine peaks, babbling mountain streams, and placid lakes demands awe from the viewer. As Ada Gobetti writes in her *Partisan Diary*, a first-hand account of the Resistance in the Valsusa, “human words are insufficient” to describe these mountains. A voiceover then tells the story of the medieval Republic of the Escartons, a utopian yesteryear where resources were jointly rationed and protected by the people from external powers. Finally,

we descend thousands of meters past grazing cattle and scattered pine trees until, in the subsequent shot, a massive rock conveyor splices the screen in two. Nature is interrupted, the clapper is snapped, and the ravages of the Anthropocene are on full display. A young French woman walks two horses along barbed wired fences and cement barricades, recently constructed for a Tunnel Euralpin



Lyon Turin (TELT) worksite and we hear her story, one told by countless others: the streams are drying up, the trees are falling, how could they take so much water from us?

Transalpin demonstrates that the struggle against the Tav is neither confined to individual experience nor restricted by geography. Through its cinematic collage, the film masterfully weaves together narratives from both sides of the Alps, code-switching seamlessly between Italian and French as it traverses national borders and mountainous terrains. By juxtaposing scenes of nature and Tav sites across different cultural and ecological landscapes, the documentary challenges viewers to see beyond the isolated struggles of local communities. Instead, it frames the No-Tav movement as a transnational campaign, united by shared values and collective action. This interconnected perspective underscores the universal

stakes of the battle, emphasizing that environmental and social justice issues transcend borders and belong to a broader, global discourse.

While unified under the umbrella of the No-Tav movement, the French and Italian sides are characterized by distinct priorities and protest cultures that the film does not fully explore. On July 31, 2024, just outside Susa, Lèò Gatinot hosted the first Italian screening of *Transalpin* at a No-Tav presidio. This garrison, located on land earmarked for TAV construction, is collectively owned by dozens of activists. The site features a 20-foot rusty trailer and a plywood shed painted with a cheerful mural of a rainbow, sun, mountains, and No-Tav flags, evoking a countercultural spirit reminiscent of the 1960s



hippy movement. Scores of local activists from Susa, Turin, Meana, and Mompantero gathered for the event, sharing a potluck dinner of toma cheese, manigotto salad, and pizza before watching Gatinot's film. Some of the activists featured in *Transalpin* were present and applauded the young Parisian filmmaker for his engaged work. During the Q&A session, Gatinot acknowledged a key difference between the two sides of the movement: while local support exists in

French towns like Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne and Villarodin-Bourget, the majority of French activists come from outside these areas, particularly through groups like Soulèvements de la Terre (Earth Uprisings). By contrast, the Italian side has a deeply rooted, local, and organic movement with widespread popular participation.

One of *Transalpin's* goals is to bridge the gap between these two sides of the movement. However, as it stands, with English subtitles currently serving as the only linguistic unifier for the alternating French and Italian voiceovers, the film seems more oriented toward an international audience than toward the communities in the Susa and Maurienne valleys. Since most local residents are fluent neither in their neighbor's language nor in English, adding Italian and French subtitles would be a valuable revision to better engage these communities.



Fundamentally, the film serves as a powerful reminder that environmental and social justice movements thrive at meaning-making when grounded in both local realities and global perspectives. Asking the viewer to internalize and reflect upon threatened landscapes, polysemic elements from nature poke and prod at our own axiologies throughout the documentary. How will the grazing Alpine ibex be protected from the ravages of industry?

Will (s)he suffer the same fate of the southern festoon? Whether by the ibex's mountainside, the cow's pasture, or the horse's fields, we are called to reflect of our own position as humans within an interdependent web of ecology. The words of professor Donna Haraway are salient: "no species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called Western scripts, acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too." Gatinot and Nicolas, through this impressive and provocative film urge us to act collectively before the fragile balance of our world is irreparably disrupted.