

# FOUCAULT IN SUSA VALLEY

## The No TAV movement and struggles for subjectivation

### INTRODUCTION

*People who talk about revolution and class struggle  
without referring explicitly to everyday life,  
without understanding what is subversive about love  
and what is positive in the refusal of constraints,  
such people have a corpse in their mouth.*

Raoul Vaneigem

The profound relevance of the No TAV movement in Europe – and, more specifically, in Italy – is today undeniable. Some of the features that make it so important for social activists and critical academics alike are the following: long duration (firstly emerged in the early 1990s, it is still broadly operational today), extreme radicality (what is strongly opposed is not only a useless and expansive infrastructure, but the current dynamics of capitalist development as a whole), and creative capacities to connect different social subjects (militant and administrators, unionists and precarious workers, etc.).

In this context, this article's aim is twofold: on the one hand, it is intended to provide an anglophone readership with some political as well as historical elements concerning the trajectory of the No TAV movement;<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, by situating such analysis against the background of Michel Foucault's reflection on governmentality and struggles for subjectivation, an hypothesis about the revolutionary nature of Susa Valley's conflict is advanced. In particular, I argue that the political significance of the No TAV movement does not merely regard a critique of neoliberal subjectivity –

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1 However, it is important to underline that various sources in English about the No TAV movement are today available: AAVV-Struggles in Italy (2012a), activist source; Healy, Greyl, Leonardi, and Temper (2012), academic source; Faris (2012), journalistic source.

although this is a necessary first step – but also prefigures and, to a certain extent, enacts new forms of sociality based on the community's collective self-government. In other words, the refusal of violent normalization seems to have sparked an unprecedented sense of solidarity which pervades all levels of everyday life and produce a sharing-centered form of social relationship.

Moreover, a sort of *incremental mechanism* appears to be at play: what originally erupted as a typical environmentalist battle became eventually a struggle against the very pillars of the capitalist system. This *process of multiplication of oppositional fronts* has allowed to movement to avoid usual either-or blocking points (e.g. green vs. red politics). It is my conviction that in such an expanding attitude – the name TAV (High-Speed Train) means today much more than a dangerously impactful infrastructure – lies one of the deepest “lessons” given to anti-capitalist theories and practices by the Susa Valley's population.

In order to attain this twofold purpose, the article is organized as follows: in the first section, I will outline Foucault's elaboration on biopolitical governmentality and the specific kind of struggles which incessantly traverses it; against this background, in the second section I will examine a few fundamental features of the No TAV movement; in the conclusion, I will emphasize once more how this movement cannot be accounted for as merely reactive and how its future challenges will concern its capability to (continue to) cross local as well as national borders.

One last methodological remark: the empirical material discussed in this article has been collected through a social ethnography conducted between 2006 and 2007.<sup>2</sup> This means that recent developments of the No TAV movements are only briefly coped with. However, it is my conviction that this reflection has not lost its validity: first, because it can be interpreted as a historical document; second – and most importantly – because in the last few years the movement has been able to maintain its open character and its irreducibility to social compromise and capitalist recuperation.

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2 Parts of this research have been published (in Italian): Leonardi (2008, 2010).

Let us now provide a few general elements concerning the No TAV struggle and the Susa Valley. This latter is a small area (just 2 km wide) situated between Maurienne in France and Turin in Italy. In the past 50 years, it has been highly urbanized by the economic development of the region. The area is scarred by infrastructures like the Frejus highway, an international railway, and numerous dams, tunnels and industries. This “development” has had significant environmental and social impacts. The High Speed Train line between Turin and Lyon is planned at the intersection of two main European axes to complement the European railway network by increasing the transport of passengers as well as goods.

According to the project, the train will pass through the Susa Valley via various tunnels, the longest one extending over 50km, to connect St. Jean-de-Maurienne (France) to Venaus (Italy). The No TAV movement, spontaneously born in the 90s, is the grass-roots movement of the Susa Valley population against the construction of the tunnel. Composed mainly by civil society committees and local institutions, its struggle is motivated by the need to protect the environment but it is also a political and cultural opposition to economic globalization. In contrast, supporters of the project are mainly found in European and national governments, as well as in companies and corporations driven by private interests in infrastructure and international trade. They argue that the High Speed Train line would improve passengers and goods transport, providing a more ecologically sound system of transportation that would also create employment and contribute to economic development. This argument perfectly reflects the neoliberal assumptions upon which the green economy *mantra* invariably rests: profit and ecological health not only are not opposed, but actually foster each other's increase. In a world shaped in the image of capital, conflict does not occur since all divergent interests can be composed by all-pervasive circuits of valorization. Unless, of course, the ideological smokescreen gets removed, exploitation emerges in all its violence and a social alternative can begin to be envisaged.

# **1. FOUCAULT: SUBJECTIVITY BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND NORMALIZATION**

Starting from the mid-1970s, Michel Foucault dedicated increasing attention to the concept of *subjectivity*. To assess it properly, he gets back to the original ambiguity of the term “subject”, which has a double Latin etymology: the neuter *subjectum*, that refers to the idea of sovereign actor, and the masculine *subjectus*, whose meaning is linked to the semantic field of subjugation. This constitutive ambivalence allows Foucault to show how subjectivity is from the very beginning and endlessly kept in a becoming composed by both *reactive forces*, that push it towards subjection, and *affirmative forces*, that strive to fully activate their potential of autonomous subjectivation. To simplify a little – it must be highlighted that ambivalence does not equal indifference or, even worse, incommunicability – it might be said that if *biopolitical governmentality* tends to impose docile and exploitable figures of subjectivity on populations, then *struggles for subjectivation* resist such forceful constraints both by escaping their injunctions and by building alternative institutional settings.

## **1.1 Biopolitical Governmentality**

*The environment must not be understood  
as the naturally given sphere of ecological processes  
which human powers try to keep under control,  
nor should it be viewed as a mysterious domain  
of obscure terrestrial events which human knowledge works to explain.  
Instead, it emerges as a historical artifact that is openly constructed,  
not an occluded reality that is difficult to comprehend*

Timothy Luke

After the publication of the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* in 1976,<sup>3</sup> and especially in

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3 See Foucault (1978).

the lectures at the Collège de France entitled *Security, Territory and Population* (1977-78)<sup>4</sup> and *Birth of Biopolitics* (1978-79),<sup>5</sup> Foucault is primarily concerned with the articulation of what can be defined as *biopolitical hypothesis*. At stake in this theoretical move is a precise, if necessary partial, historical account of the emergence, in the course of the eighteenth century, of a new form of power, substantially different from its previously dominant configuration, namely sovereignty. From an empirical perspective it is possible to situate the emergence of biopolitics in the progressive implementation of governmental technologies of power which aim at the simultaneous empowerment of individual and collective bodies. With the term *governmentality*, Foucault refers to the *ensemble* of institutions, tactics and analyses that allow a specific kind of power to be exercised over the population through a knowledge apparatus defined by political economy and a set of technical *dispositifs* oriented toward security. This set of practices was organized around four main fields of intervention: *natality*, *morbidity*, *ability*, and *environment*.<sup>6</sup> According to Foucault, biopolitics implies the political creation of an intermediate space between natural environment and artificial urbanization, investing in particular the process of shaping natural systems (both at the climatic and hydrographical level) according to governmental expansive necessities.

At a more speculative level, the core of such a biopolitical hypothesis resides in a novel formulation of the classical theoretical element which refers to the relationship between *life* and *politics*. To simplify, it might be argued that before the emergence of biopolitics, the relation between life and politics was *extrinsic*, in the sense that the two poles defined different fields of intervention and development which, although often overlapping each other, were used to be conceived autonomously, as irreducibly distinct. On the contrary, after the “threshold of biological modernity” was crossed, the two fields merged into one set of phenomena within the context of which their respective identities became indistinguishable (Foucault 1978, 143). In other words, life became a specific target of political

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4 See Foucault (2007).

5 See Foucault (2008).

6 See Foucault (2003).

power and, as a consequence, their relationship was configured as *intrinsic*. To put it differently: neither scientific reductionism nor cultural determinism can properly represent the new internal and qualitative connection between life and politics. The governmental *dispositif* through which this epochal passage was accomplished is to be found in the notion of population and, in particular, in its subjective dimension as grounded on the concept of *desire*: population is, in fact, nothing else than a weaving of heterogeneous desires. Some of them are irrepressible but potentially noxious, whereas others might produce, when left free to spontaneously organize, something like a nebulous “general interest of population.” Here governmentality must act as a *translation process* in which the passive acceptance of a plurality of irreducible desires co-exists with the active regulation of their interplay (Pandolfi 2006). The interface between artificiality of history and naturalness of species is the battlefield upon which power/knowledge apparatuses (attempt to) tailor governable subjective clothes for the population.

This process is particularly visible with regard to the notion of *environment*. As Timothy Luke has brilliantly shown, in fact, such a concept is neither innocently natural nor politically neutral; rather, it represents “a nexus for knowledge formation and a cluster of power tactics”. In other words, it configures unprecedented bundles of “geo-power and eco-knowledge” (Luke 1995, 66). Such novelty can be unmistakably appreciated by considering a fashionable discursive formation as *green economy*. Against the background of the current, devastating economic crisis (whose long-term causes have been silently under way since the early 1980s), the green economy might be described as a capitalist attempt to overcome financial turmoils based on the incorporation of environmental limits as new terrains for accumulation and valorization. In Foucauldian terms: as unprecedented key elements for a new configuration of governmental practices. In fact, what was once an unsurpassable obstruction to economic growth and ever-expanding production of tangible objects (environment as a limit to valorization), has supposedly become a new driver – more powerful than ever! – of capital

accumulation (environment as a productive element of valorization).<sup>7</sup>

This development – perfectly in line with the shift of emphasis from exchange to competition that Foucault considers the fundamental divergence between liberalism and neoliberalism – implies a profound modification in the way through which populations make themselves and are made as subjects. As Jason Read appropriately notes, “neoliberalism entails a massive extension of the field and scope of economics” (2009, 28). Once a sphere amongst other within the broader context of human society, economics in neoliberalism becomes the measure of all things or, otherwise put, an incontestable regime of truth. From the point of view of subjectivity, two overlapping figures populate the neoliberal theatre: the restless and risk-prone entrepreneur of himself in the realm of production, and the zealous and self-interested citizen in the context of civil society.

## 1.2 Struggles for Subjectivation

*The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them*

Michel Foucault

To simplify a little, I think it can be argued that so far, by speaking about biopolitical governmentality and green economy, the addressed issue was *normalization*. Although there are significant differences between liberal and neoliberal forms of normalization – as well as within these two wide categories – I contend that a fair general account of such a notion is the following: a set of knowledge apparatuses and power techniques aimed at conforming individual and collective behaviors to pre-established canons in order maximize their productivity. In Foucault, however, this is only half

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<sup>7</sup> See Leonardi (forthcoming).

of the story. As he famously wrote: “Where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault 1978, 95). This means that resistance comes first, presents itself as ontologically irrepressible and rests on an intransitive idea of freedom: “Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (2000, 342).

The link between this elaboration and our search for an adequate framework to analyze the No TAV movement is to be found in an essay titled *The Subject and Power*, originally published in 1982, in which Foucault proposes to subdivide social conflicts into three categories that, albeit neither mutually exclusive nor evolutionarily successive, differentiate historical epochs according to their relative, tendential hegemony. The first category is represented by the resistance against various forms of *domination* (moral, political, religious); the second is configured as opposition to *exploitation*, conceived of in economic terms as violent separation between the producer and the product of her labour; finally, the third refers to the attempts made by social actors to subtract themselves from *subjection*, which is to say the set of practices that ties individuals to a fixed identity and, in so doing, favor their submission to others. In positive terms, this third category can be defined as *struggles for subjectivation*.<sup>8</sup>

According to Foucault, our contemporaneity is marked by the progressive prevailing of the third kind of struggle, in which at stake are the *processes of subjectivation*. These processes are conceived of as both *resistance* against normalization and active *engagement* in new, non-constrained identitarian articulations. These processes involve a specific *transversality* with regard to traditional definitions of working class struggle – sometimes exclusively centered around the interests of waged labourers.

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8 This irreducibility of Foucault's position to rigid evolutionism is crucial not only from a theoretical perspective, but also in political terms since it deeply affects the possibility to think and organize alliances between different forms of struggle. Therefore, it is useful to entirely report the passage concerning the issue at stake: “I think that in history you can find a lot of examples of these three kinds of social struggles, either isolated from each other or mixed together. But even when they are mixed, one of them, most of the time, prevails. For instance, in the feudal societies, the struggles against the forms of ethnic or social domination were prevalent, even though economic exploitation could have been very important among the revolt's causes. In the nineteenth century, the struggle against exploitation came into the foreground. And nowadays, the struggle against the forms of subjection – against the submission of subjectivity – is becoming more and more important, even though the struggles against forms of domination and exploitation have not disappeared. Quite the contrary.” (2000, 334).



Furthermore, the object against which they are exercised is not power *per se*, but the material, local effects of power. Finally, and crucially, what is at stake in these processes is *knowledge* (its sources, its usage, its production). As Foucault poignantly notes:

[struggles for subjectivation] are an opposition to the effects of power linked with knowledge, competence and qualification – struggles against the privileges of knowledge. But they are also an opposition to secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations imposed on people. There is nothing 'scientistic' in this (that is, a dogmatic belief in the value of scientific knowledge), but neither is it a skeptical or relativistic refusal of all verified truth. What is questioned is the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relation to power. In short, its regime of truth (2000, 330-331).

As it is manifest, the fundamental goal of struggles for subjectivation is the disarticulation of normalizing regimes of truth. The critique of knowledge apparatuses through which subjection is imposed on people is configured as appropriation and then inversion of their mechanisms. Moreover, this focus on knowledge can be read, I believe, in accordance with the recent hypothesis of cognitive capitalism as a contemporary mode of accumulation, valorisation and exploitation.<sup>9</sup> It suggests to approach the dialectic between social struggles and capitalist development in non-linear historical terms, as a contested battlefield rather than as an indisputable starting point. Consequently, the effectiveness of revolutionary movements should be measured according to their capability to read the specific tendency of contemporary social development and then to disarticulate the capitalist regime of truth upon which it rests.

No movement, however, can last long time on a merely critical basis; in the case of the No TAV, the mobilization of an almost entire alpine population for more than twenty years – and on a variety of issues – needed a prefiguration of a different institutional setting.<sup>10</sup> The notion of *profanation*, recently

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9 On this point, see Leonardi (2010).

10 Prefigurative politics is one of the main features of eco-socialism as envisaged by Joel Kovel: “The prefigurative praxes that are to overcome capital in an ecosocialist way are at once very remote and exactly at hand. They are remote insofar

re-interpreted in a very original way by Giorgio Agamben, nicely captures this twofold nature of the Susa Valley's activist community. In fact, a profanation does not simply *criticize* the *status quo* and the governmental ideology upon which it is established, but also provides concrete alternatives, albeit often in embryonic forms, by *creatively* shaping new modes of being, new behaviors, new and previously inconceivable terrain of struggle. Appropriately connecting these two levels, and importantly recalling the nature of capital as an antagonistic social relation, Agamben states:

It is possible that the unprofanable, on which the capitalist religion is founded, is not truly such, and that today there are still effective forms of profanation. For this reason, we must recall that profanation does not simply restore something like a natural use that existed before being separated into the religious, economic, or juridical sphere. This operation is more cunning and complex than that and is not limited to abolishing the form of separation in order to regain an uncontaminated use that lies either beyond or before it (2007, 81).

Let us underline once again the doubleness of *profanations*: immanent critique of the present state of affairs *and* material prefiguration of a new possible social structure. In temporal terms, the reference to a desirable future enacts already existing critical potentials in such a way that an opposition to the *status quo* immediately activates the construction of a new form of social organization, previously unimaginable.

## **2. NO TAV MOVEMENT**

I will now try to apply this theoretical interface between biopolitical governmentality and

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as the entire regime of capital stands in the way of their realization; and they are at hand insofar as a movement toward the future exists embedded in every point of the social organism where a need arises [...] If everything has a prefigurative potential, then prefiguration will be scattered over the entire, disorderly surface of the world [...] This is a blessing, because it signifies that there is no privileged agent of ecosocialist transformation, but it also imposes a great responsibility. For as they now exist, instances of ecocentric production are scattered and mainly entrapped like irritants in the pores of capital. The task is to free them and connect them, so that their inherent potential may be realized" (Kovel 2002, 240-241).

struggles for subjectivation to the concrete conflict that is taking place in Susa Valley. With the emergence of the No TAV movement in the 1990s, five phases of the opposition to the High Speed Train project can be distinguish. Firstly, at the very beginning, the polemical objects were the nefarious impacts that such a gigantic project (building yards for – at the very least – 15 years) would have on the everyday liveability of an alpine valley. Secondly, in the mid-1990s, the population started to criticize the huge economic costs of the project and its problematic financial architecture. Thirdly, around 2000, new ecological issues emerged. In fact, the mountains to be perforated are filled with uranium, radon and asbestos.

Fourthly, there was a rough escalation of the conflict during the winter of 2005, when the valley was militarized (more than 2000 *carabinieri* tried to protect the bulldozers). As a consequence, the struggle committees called for a general strike (more than 80.000 marched in Turin) and for a permanent mobilization that ended up “re-conquering” the sites where the drilling was supposed to take place. These areas were transformed in *presidi* (garrisons), free buildings where the population still organizes its resistance. These garrisons, however, progressively became socializing places: there, still today, people eat together, play cards or board games, watch movies, organize concerts and various activities (theatre, singing shows, farmers markets, etc.). This fourth phase is characterized by a broad extension of the critique, which now puts radically into question the current model of capitalist development in its generality, without limiting itself to the High Speed Train, which is perceived as nothing more than a contingent emanation of that model.

Finally, the current situation: the commencement of the fifth period, from May 03, 2011 was marked by a political meeting of local and national leaders in favour of the project, to the exclusion of opponents and other critics. This meeting signified a re-launch of the project with works set to recommence in early June of 2011, stimulating another cycle of mobilisation, violent repression, and an intensified criminalization of the movement that has seen numerous clashes between police and protesters, and arrests as recently as February 2012.

## 2.1 Disarticulating the Infrastructural Dispositif

*The protesters worry that the tunnel will unleash  
a host of environmental consequences as it cuts through underground waterways,  
uncovered deep veins of uranium and asbestos,  
and fills the valley air with dust, sickening the young and old.  
They observe—accurately—that in Italy,  
large public works have a way of busting their budgets and fueling corruption.  
And they ask whether in a time of crisis,  
the government should invest billions in a project facing such fierce opposition.  
“They say, ‘Let’s sit around the table and discuss the least impactful way to build it,’ ”  
says [longstanding No Tav activist Alberto] Perino.  
“We say, ‘Let’s first find out if it’s useful and indispensable,  
and then we can sit at the table.’ ”*

Bloomberg Businessweek

In this context, it is possible to isolate some elements of the protest that can be interpreted through the twofold nature of profaning struggles for subjectivation. Let us start with the deconstructive moment. Since the 1990s, the population of the Susa Valley had to interact with a very particular power/knowledge *dispositif*, that we might define *Infrastructural Dispositif*, which is inscribed in a regime of truth whose principle of veridiction is represented by *market laws*. Italy knew and to a certain extent still knows an economic conjuncture such that the valorizing element is the infrastructure in itself or, more prosaically, the very act of building it. From this perspective, the dominant rhetoric is based on a dogmatic equation which is as indisputable as undemonstrable at an empirical level. This equation is the following: *infrastructure* (in this case the High Speed Train) = *modernization* = *economic growth*. To realize the strength of this dogma it is sufficient to recall the results of a study on the media coverage of these issues between 2005 and 2006.<sup>11</sup> Well, the only argument pro-Train famous analysts and authoritative journalists could find was a mere adhesion of principle to the above mentioned dogma.

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<sup>11</sup> See Calafati (2006).

There are two supports that allow the translation of this equation at the social level in its materiality. The first support, of a contractual and financial nature, implies the transfer of the enterprise risk from general contractors to public administrations. This *escamotage* occurs through the establishment of corporations with significant public participations but exclusively regulated by private law. Furthermore, by means of this mechanism the specific interest of the building company ends up being that of delaying the works as much as possible. The second support is juridical and found its legislative ratifications during the second Berlusconi government, between 2001 and 2002. To be extremely synthetic, these measures legalize the described contractual architecture and allow some projects, considered to be of “strategic interest”, to bypass public controls that are mandatory in ordinary procedures.

As every governmental *dispositif*, also the *Infrastructural Dispositif* produces and activates a “normal” figure of subjectivity, to which individuals and populations are incited to conform. In this case, the figure of “good citizen”, attentive to its private affairs but careless of the public sphere, which politically “chooses” every couple of years through the elections, supports and fictitiously counterbalances the vertical and executive decisionism which is promoted by the *dispositif*. It is exactly this submissive and dormant subjectivity that the population of the Susa Valley seems to have refused. And a key role in this process has been played by the extraordinary diffusion of technical knowledge.

Among activists, a common joke states that in Susa Valley is to be found the highest worldwide concentration of transportation experts. Patiently produced and then meticulously shared, this oppositional knowledge allowed protesters to technically penetrate and politically disarticulate the regime of truth based on the market upon which the *Infrastructural Dispositif* is grounded. The quality of the knowledge produced by the No TAV movement is today recognized even by supporters of the project and, as a consequence, not a single drilling has taken place to date.

## **2.2 Prefiguring a New World**

*The No TAV slogan is on display across the valley,  
on flags hanging from light poles, on signs by the side of the road,  
on concrete pylons, and on the sides of buildings.  
Recent protests have attracted hundreds from all over the country,  
including many from organizations with reputations for violent protest.  
With work on the project scheduled to begin in the summer,  
nobody should be surprised if the silence gives way to a storm.*

Bloomberg Businessweek [2012]

The creative dimension of the No TAV struggle is closely linked with the features I just highlighted but inaugurates a distinct political moment. To simplify a little, it might be affirmed that the relationship between knowledge diffusion and the emergence of new forms of sociality – as well as unprecedented conflict fronts – is configured as bidirectional, since the first represents simultaneously a cause and an effect of the second, and vice versa. However, it is possible to isolate a turning point, a critical event that transformed a knowledgeable and determined opposition into an indomitable and sometimes even violent mass movement. This critical event is the creation of *presidi* [garrisons]. The common life experienced in these places actualized all the potentialities of the movement (of knowledge, organization and determination) and produced an extraordinary *subjective effervescence* and a widespread *popular activism*.

The question concerning self-government is crucial to understand the profound meaning of this process. The No TAV movement, by means of the diffusion of knowledge, could participate to the regime of truth expressed by the proponents of the High Speed Train. At the same time, however, passing through moments of strong social conflict, the movement was able to disarticulate the mechanisms of that same regime of truth, both by refusing its normalizing effects and by actively claiming autonomous self-normation. This is the source of the new forms of sociality that are emerging everywhere in the Susa Valley. They involve a creative and collective recomposition of the everyday routine of the previous modes of living. A confirmation of this can be found in the words of Paola Meinardi, a long-term activist I interviewed in 2007:

New sociality? Yes, this is true. Completely. New aggregation, new sociality. Common meals, common projects... This is the *presidio*, after all: it's a place to be together, to create new ideas. Apart from discussions about the High Speed Train (that we often do), there is a lot of energy: instead of going to the pub or watching TV at home, people just come here, drink a glass of wine or beer and plan things, think, talk and socialize. It's nice. The sociality has really changed, completely.<sup>12</sup>

A quote from Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecology* perfectly represents, in more theoretical terms, this incremental and revolutionary dynamics:

By means of these transversal tools [*clefts*], subjectivity is able to install itself simultaneously in the realm of the environment, in the major social and institutional assemblages, and symmetrically in the landscapes and fantasies of the most intimate spheres of the individual. The reconquest of a degree of creative autonomy in one particular domain encourages conquests in other domains – the catalyst for a gradual re forging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself starting at the most miniscule level (1991, 69).

Nowadays, in the garrisons is all but rare to find discussions and seminars about de-growth, climate justice, participatory democracy, food sovereignty or energetic self-sufficiency. Moreover, new conflicts arise: in 2006 the No TAV movement opposed the enlargement of the Frejus highway, whereas in 2007 a large campaign was launched to ask the industrial reorganization of a highly polluting steel plant in the valley. All this happens in an atmosphere of solidarity and sharing that surprised me every time I visited the valley. As activist Marco Cedolin minutely argued:

An individual who self-constructs herself cannot – once she has achieved a high level of technical and scientific knowledge – put such notions away and refuse to logically and coherently assess different problems than the one through which this knowledge was

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<sup>12</sup> See Leonardi (2007).

attained. There's no way her social field can be approached as it was before. This knowledge provides a new standpoint from which no aspect of the world look the same. So, if you have fought the TAV; if you didn't limit yourself to hating the High Speed Train, but decided to know it in order to destroy it; well, if this is what happened to you, then you will apply the same thought/action procedure to everything else. Maybe once the second gallery of the Frejus tunnel seemed to have nothing to with you: well, the No TAV glasses show you that's not the case. Perhaps the Beltrame steel plant didn't interest you because you were living far enough from it: well, you were mistaken and the struggle made you understand that your territory's well-being is the condition of possibility for your body's health – and that of your soul, of course! So, we started with the High Speed Train and now we're beyond it; but believe me we aren't going to stop any soon! From this point of you, I'd say the No TAV struggles goes far beyond itself!<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

*Although its social composition is fragmented,  
the NoTAV movement has assumed a class struggle character  
insofar as it has understood that capital exploits the environment as a means of production,  
disfiguring the territory and its inhabitants to extract profit from them.  
So the intransigence of the Susa Valley's population  
becomes the prolongation of the factory-based working class' intransigence  
(which is inscribed in the history of working class' struggles in this zone).*

Carlo Formenti

As reported in the introduction, this article is empirically based on a social ethnography conducted in 2006/2007 and, as such, it does not take properly into account crucial events which have shaped the No TAV struggle in the last five years or so. Nonetheless, it is my conviction that from what precedes it is possible to derive a few reflections about the future of the movement (especially considering that it is, as recent demonstrations unmistakably show<sup>14</sup>, alive and well). In my opinion, the

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13 See Leonardi (2007).

14 See for example: AAVV-Struggles in Italy (2012b).



No TAV protest can be interpreted as a paradigmatic case of profaning struggle for subjectivation. Not only it successfully criticized the regime of truth of the opposite party, but also prefigured a possible social alternative based on a direct, communitarian self-government. As it has been recently argued in a brilliant book put together by activists from the Turin-based social center *Askatasuna* (2013), the No TAV movement resolutely refused representative institutions not to embrace populist ideologies, but to engage on the concrete terrain of inventing counter-institutions grounded on participatory and direct democracy (garrisons, struggle committees, popular assemblies [physical], permanent assemblies [digital]).

This study, however, does not want to be an apology. Therefore, I would like to conclude by pointing to two crucial dangers and a possible political task to avoid them. The first potential problem is *closure*. When a movement achieves its goals, it always risks to stop experimenting, to folding up onto its comfortable identity. Recurrent frictions between the grass-roots committees and local administrators made visible the constitutive fragility of an alliance that was fundamental in 2005 but needs to be renewed in this new phase. The second risk is *co-optation*. Without a continuous process of progressive – if resolutely anti-State! – institutionalization, the powerful energy expressed by the No TAV movement risks dispersal in a myriad of small and disconnected projects or, in the worst-case scenario, to be recuperated by governments and corporations as a source of legitimation. Without social duration, the remarkable results of this struggle might eventually disappear.

To avoid these difficulties, I think that the No TAV movement should actively practice a sort of *strategic convergence* with other local and regional movements disseminated in Italy and Europe; recent developments suggest this is the path Susa Valley's activists intend to walk – at least at a national level (Pizzo and Sullo, 2012). My impression is that it might be useful to focus on an *ecology of the common*, to be conceived of as an original morphogenesis of territorial and cultural re-appropriation – an *ecology of the common* in which every oppositional issue should be included without claiming hegemony. *Transversality* and *reciprocal increase*: it is at this level, I believe, that local and regional

movements such as No TAV will have to measure their social incisiveness.

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